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The Magus of Genesis

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THE AGE OF NAMES

Kanto Ishinomiya Presents...
始まりの魔法使い



ファンタジア文庫

The Magus of Genesis

vol.1

by Ishinomiya Kanto

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始まりの魔法使い ◆ 名前の時代

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あとがき

“ THE LAND OF GENESIS, THE PROMISED LAND.
THE PLACE IT ALL BEGAN— ”

THE MAGUS OF GENESIS

#01

THE AGE OF NAMES

Prologue



In an age long lost to legend and myth.

In an age where humans had still yet to establish a system of writing.

It's said that there existed a Magus in a country named Scarlet.

It's said that he imparted knowledge concerning language and writing, taught how to cultivate the lands, instructed the ways of raising animals, and brought about the gift—nay, the magic of fire.

It's said that he was a dauntless youth, a dragon clad in scarlet red scales, a person worshiped far and wide.

It's said that this man was the God of Civilization.

Yet strangely, his name had been virtually wiped from the records.

Therefore, he was simply referred to as—

—the Magus of Genesis.

Episode One of HHK's Great People series.

This episode would discuss a legendary figure with many secrets: the Magus of Genesis.

"You're watching that again?"

My attention stuck on the television, I heard a familiar, surprised voice from behind me.

"I just finished cleaning up, so I'm taking a small break."

"I didn't mean it like that... but okay."

I know what she wanted to say, but I answered as though I didn't.

Even I'm a bit surprised at myself.

I've probably watched this recording at least ten times by now.

"Every time I see you sitting hunched over in front of the television like that, you look like some old grandma."

"Well, you are right about me being old."

I didn't want someone like Nina-san, a girl who's older than me both physically and mentally, to tell me that, but no matter how much time passes she's just as youthful as ever. Be it her glossy blonde hair and flawless white skin, she barely looks like a teenager, much less an adult. It wasn't just her appearance either, much the same could be said about her mentality. She's lazing around on her stomach on the sofa and—judging by the sounds coming from her phone—playing some game.

"Really, Professor Nina... Please clean up after yourself!"

A girl with her black hair pulled into a bun appeared, her cheeks swelling.

Speaking of youths, this child is Kanata-chan. She looks around twenty, but she's definitely the youngest in terms of personality.

Mumbling complaints one after another, she made a seal and

several dwarves appeared. They picked up Nina-san's clothes scattered about the room and carried them to the washing machine.

"Sorry about that, I'll do it next time."

Nina-san said that, but even without turning around to take a look, I could easily imagine that she hadn't even looked up from her game.

"What's all the noise about?"

Finished with cleaning the dishes, a petite, red-haired girl showed up.

"Professor Yuuki! Please say something to... to this lazy elf shut-in!"

"Hmm. She didn't used to be like this a long time ago... ah, is this that Great People series? Let me watch too!"

As Yuuki-chan smiled with a troubled look on her face, she saw the program I was watching. She came flying over with a cushion to use after noticing what it was, sitting right next to me.

"Eeh... but Professor Nina's been like that for as long as I can remember..."

Saying that, Kanata-chan sat down next to me as well.

"I've already worked my share in life. I'm going to spend the rest of it how I want."

"It all happened before you were born, Kanata-chan. She used to be an incredibly hard worker. I'm sure she did easily ten or twenty people's work herself."

When I followed up on what Yuuki-chan said, Nina-san rolled over onto her back, tapping on her phone all the while.

"Nina-san, Nina-san, could you taste this for me please?"

Just then, Kruse-chan appeared and plunged a spoon right into Nina-san's mouth.

She didn't seem to mind it either as she munched on it.

"How's it taste?"

"Mm. It's spicy enough... but he likes it saltier."

"Roger!"

"Eeek! Professor Kruse, please don't surprise me like that!"

Turning towards Kruse-chan after hearing her lively response, Kanata-chan shouted in surprise.

All she saw after turning around was Kruse-chan's head covered with her fluffy pink-blond hair and her right arm floating in the air.

"Sorry, I'm busy right now and can't get away from it."

"Didn't you just do that though!?"

"Oh come on, just get used to it already. It's only ever just her arms, legs, head, and guts."

"Uuu, I don't think I'm going to be able to eat meat for a while..."

Well, it's not as though I disagree that disembodied organs are a bit much for a girl...

"Now then, just need to cook it. Kana-chan, pardon the intrusion."

"Why're you coming over to me—!?"

Kruse-chan's head floated over to Kanata-chan, landing down on and fitting perfectly in her lap.

As for why... it's definitely because her reactions are always amusing.

"That looks fun. Can Azel join in too?"

"Azel-chan, good work. You finished folding the laundry?"

“Affirmative. Azel’s head can detach as well. Would that surprise you, Kanata?”

Followed by a popping sound, Azel-chan removed her own head.

“Hmm. Azel-chan, when you do it, it’s more...”

“Unfortunate.”

“Professor Azel, you’re so beautiful that it just looks like something that just happens naturally.”

It really is like how Kanata-chan said. Even when she’s just a head, it doesn’t have that horror feeling to it. It’s probably because she’s so expressionless and looks so good. Her lengthy amethyst-like hair is like a work of art.

“H-hey now, I’m right here! So I’m not pretty am I!”

Kruse-chan’s also a beauty with her pink hair, but she’s just too extreme with her expressions.

“Professor Kruse, your cross-section’s a bit gross.”

In the end, Azel-chan and Yuuki-chan both sat down and watched the television with me.

“Come to think of it, is Master not here right now?”

“He’s out shopping with Rin right now. He should be back soon though.”

“Ah, looks like he’s back right now.”

When Kruse-chan responded to Azel-chan’s question, Yuuki-chan said that without looking away from the television.

“I’m back~”

Just like what Yuuki-chan predicted, Rin-chan’s voice could be heard from the entrance way.

“Huh, Professor Yuuki? What did you use, detection-type magic?”

“No, I just heard their footsteps.”

Yuuki-chan responded to Kanata-chan absentmindedly.

“No no no way, even if you heard some footsteps, isn’t that just everyone walking around outside? You can figure out who’s who?”

“It’s her race, it’s a bit weird.”

Although elves had incredible hearing themselves, it’d be impossible for even Nina-san to be able to distinguish between that many people. She spoke in a bored tone.

And, as expected, being able to distinguish between people at that distance is definitely impossible for me.

“I’m wiped~”

Saying that, Rin-chan dove onto the sofa. The blue-haired woman that could only be described as a cool beauty morphed into what looked more like an adorable ten year old girl—and immediately moved from the space left open for her onto Nina-san.

“Heavy! There’s a spot for you like right there!”

“Well I’m sorry that I take up the whole sofa myself!”

Giving the two a sidelong glance, my ears caught the sound of another person’s footsteps coming from the entrance way.

Pulling off that feat like Yuuki-chan isn’t possible for me, but I would never mistake his footsteps.

“Welcome back.”

“I’m home.”

When I opened the door to the living room, a smile lit up across his face.

“Oh, everyone’s here... ah, you’re all watching that again?”

When he looked towards the television, he said the same thing as Nina-san.

But the difference was that he hadn't said it with surprise, he'd said it with a tinge of embarrassment.

"Big brother, watch it with us. Though well, it's already almost over."

When Yuuki-chan took his hand and brought him into our circle, Nina-san put her phone away and took position next to me.

— The Magus of Genesis, the enigmatic person who could be called the Guardian of Mankind could be among us even now, watching over us all —

With the announcer's final words, the program concluded.

"—So."

Nina-san spoke in a sarcastic tone.

"Oh Guardian of Mankind, what's today's bounty?"

"... Three spring onions at 48 Yen each."

"At least you're protecting our finances, then."

She responded to him, a smile making its way onto her face as she laughed in spite of herself.

"Hey, hey! I joined halfway through, I want to watch it from the start!"

"Ah, me too! I'll bring my body here too."

"Hold on, I'm going to put this stuff in the fridge so wait for me!"

Yuuki-chan started making a racket and Kruse-chan joined in asking for the same thing followed by Rin-chan morphing into a large tiger and bolting into the kitchen like the wind.

Once everyone gathered together in the living room, I replayed

the program from the beginning.

“Master. How true is this information?”

“Hmm... half of it’s nonsense, the other half’s explained weirdly.”

“So you’re saying most of it’s a lie!?”

Kanata-chan hopped in their conversation when he responded to Azel-chan.

It’s true, the [Magus of Genesis] talked about on television was an extremely respectable person, one who would never be wrong nor make a mistake. A godlike existence.

That the truth wasn’t actually like that... I know well.

However.

“Yeah, most of it is.”

Looking at the likeness drawn of the [Magus of Genesis] descending upon people living in stone houses, Nina-san spoke.

However, I also know well of the hardships he went through.

Although there was little truth left within the stories discussed in television programs, it’s for that reason that I can now close my eyes and remember those events like they’d happened just yesterday.

— It’s said that the country of Scarlet became the current Anayama Prefecture. The area’s rich folklore being what passed down through the years —

Together with that announcement, the video of a forest taken from above started playing.

Sighing within my heart, I looked to my side. He had done the same and was looking at my face.

The land of genesis, the promised land.

The place where it all began—

Chapter 1: Soulshift



*Everything has but one end.
Only sausages have two.*
—A German Proverb

Have you ever felt like wanting to soar through the skies?

Or perhaps like wanting to become invisible and play a prank?

Or maybe you've wanted to talk to animals at some point?

Anything is fine.

Mankind has dreamt of countless things since time immemorial, solving each through the power of science.

Starting with the first manned flight by the Wright brothers, aircrafts eventually evolved into rockets powered by ion engines and personal flying vehicles.

It's kept to military uses only, but even something like optical camouflage has already reached maturity. It's said that the use of ether is a commonly used means of finding the enemy in modern battles.

Although conversing with animals that don't have the intelligence to understand speech is closer to being joke material, the application of highly efficient machine translation has long since broken down the walls separating the human race from itself. There's even been some amount of cultural exchange beginning with dolphins, some squids, and chimpanzees.

The past century could easily be called the age of science.

But.

But, even so, I still couldn't abandon my yearning.

My yearning for the wondrous fruit, the miracle of miracles, something far removed from the modern way of thought.

Namely, for magic.

I couldn't even remember whether or not I had an impetus for my desire by now.

Rather, there might not have existed one to begin with.

I was but a youth when I'd realized that I was captivated by the concept of magic, something that was not of this world, and set out to pursue something that couldn't be explained by science.

Rune magic, calligraphy magic, European rune magic, alchemy, astrology, witchery, sorcery, wizardry, esoteric shamanism, yin yang techniques. I studied all sorts of magic from all ages and countries, putting their methods to the test.

My interests didn't stop at magic, of course.

Apparitions, spirits, mysterious sightings, psychokinesis, deities, and demons. I studied every last piece of myths, legends, and folklore the world over. Whenever I came across mention of someone with some unexplained ability I would attempt to meet them if at all possible.

At some point while I went on about doing that, I came to be known as a world famous occult researcher.

It'd put my eighty-nine years of life into it.

Spending my life on pursuing the mysterious, I came to a conclusion.

This world has no mysteries.

The world was too robust.

Everything had been done. There was not a single mysterious thing left, the only things that appeared to be were simply due to misconceptions.

Of course, it wasn't as though I'd verified everything. There were occasionally things that I could only define as strange.

But even those things were far from being what I could deem as mysterious.

I don't know how future generations will assess those things, but subjectively, the effort that took my whole life ended as being all for naught. Seeking that which did not exist, I finished my life with neither wife nor children.

It would be a lie for me to say that I had no regrets. I have innumerable regrets.

However, I never once regretted the way I lived my life.

If I were born ten more times, I'd live my life in the same way another ten times.

Besides, at the very end, there's only one enjoyment left to me.

I'd like to be disappointed one last time.

But this is the first time that I don't have to worry about being disappointed. If you must know why, it's because right now, the existence of 'Me' is coming to an end.

Giving away to my fading consciousness, I slowly closed my eyes. My world was swallowed by darkness.

I died.

—To be exact, I should have died.

The area around me was pitch black when I next came to. I'm aware that I had died. Is this the afterworld?

Also, I keep hearing the sound of moving water in my ears. Given that I can't even see anything now that I've died, shouldn't it be more quiet? I think it should be, at least.

Moreover, I feel unusually cramped. Immediately after I tried holding my hand out, the tips of my fingers hit something soft. I can't see anything, but it seems like there's something there. With that there, I can't even stretch myself out. This is weird. My body feels as light as a feather, yet I can't move around too well at all. I can't even brace my feet against the ground to press against the wall. Something weird is going on here.

I have to get out of this confined area. Just as I thought that and started to struggle, I heard a voice coming from somewhere. I couldn't hear it that clearly, but I could still understand that I'd never heard the language before.

But I could somehow understand what the meaning behind those words were.

I also somehow began to understand where I was.

It seemed as though I'm not in the afterworld. Quite the opposite, in fact. I gently touched the wall I'd so rashly pressed against a moment ago.

The voice I heard before was an affectionate one, a woman's. A voice worrying about the child in her belly.

In other words, I appear to be in the living world.

Alone, I had trembled within my mother's womb.

Reincarnation. Moreover, a form of reincarnation that allowed me to be reborn with memories of my previous life.

Is there anything as mysterious as something like that? To be

honest, I practically didn't believe in things like life after death and reincarnation.

I thought that I would stop existing upon dying, the existence of myself and my thoughts ceasing to be.

It's not as though I'm not feeling just a little disappointment that I'd had to part from my world to experience this. Being so robust, it was the world that had continually betrayed my life's work. It was something of a rival to me, pushing me forward to persevere that much harder.

However, that small amount of disappointment was dispelled by the sheer delight and feeling of satisfaction spreading through my chest. If I was pushed to say, I'd say that dissatisfaction was something of a victor's right. Although there's a possibility that I will end up losing my memories as I grow up, that's alright. I will bow out and quit while I'm ahead.

But still, I have to be born safely... well, even if I'm eager for it to happen, there's nothing I can really do about it. I guess I could be careful and make sure I don't go out feet first? I also have to avoid stupid things like strangling myself with my umbilical cord.

Once I thought about that, I realized something. I don't have an umbilical cord attached to me. What? What!? I felt around my stomach in a panic, but there really isn't one attached. When I tried turning my body in circles as a test, I was able to keep on going forever. I'm wireless here. What happened?

Just when I started panicking, the pressure around me suddenly started to increase. No way...

No sooner than I thought that, I felt my body forcibly pushed somewhere. I couldn't resist it with my strength as an unborn child, so I allowed myself to be taken by it.

My pitch black field of view was suddenly filled with light, so I shut my eyes to block out the light. Like that, I was quickly dragged out by gravity and fell to the ground.

It looks like I was able to be born safe and sound. While on the

subject, I can't say I know what a baby's supposed to do right now, but I assume I should be crying?

Thinking about something as trivial as that, I opened my eyes a little and saw both of my arms covered in red. I get that babies are a bit red, but aren't I a little too red? I was single in my previous life, but I have seen my younger sister's baby. That baby was definitely not this red. I'm practically scarlet.

I tried putting some strength into my body and heard the sound of something wet on my back. Still on the ground, I looked at my back.

It was also red. No—the redness didn't matter. What's important is that there's something I've never seen before there. And it looks like wet clothes. They're probably wet since I just left my mother's womb. But as far as I know, there aren't any creatures born with clothes on.

Someone licked my head while I was busy being confused. When I looked up out of reflex, I saw a huge face many times larger than my own staring back at me. Its mouth was open, a familiar voice coming from it. It was the voice I'd heard inside her womb. In other words, she's my mother.

She had a long, snakelike neck on her scarlet, scaly body. Her golden eyes with vertical pupils watched me fixedly. Teeth filled her reptilian, elongated mouth and some number of horns grew from the back of her head as well. There were knife-like talons sprouting from both her long and dexterous forelegs and her thick and weighty hind legs. A long tail extended from her hips and batlike wings were situated on her back.

The things on my back are probably similar, mini-sized versions of hers. Seeing her body, I remembered something.

That something was an existence that anyone would know, let alone someone who researched all of the world's mysteries like me.

That is, a dragon.

Just a moment ago I was wondering if there was anything that could be more mysterious than reincarnation. But now I'm beginning to realize that that line of thought was wrong.

I've finally found one of the mysteries I've been searching for. It just happens to be me.

Chapter 2: A Chance Encounter



*At that time, I thought I'd been saved.
But now that I think back on it, I should have run away.
... I'm kidding.
—The Verdant Witch, Nina*

Ten years of me as a Dragon passed in the blink of an eye.

I'd finally gotten used to living as a dragon and had even reached the point that I could safely fly in the sky, but I was at a loss.

The reason for that was because Mother Dragon drove me out of the den.

I say that I was driven out, but it's more like it was time for me to leave and make a den of my own.

As I flew through the air thinking about what I should do from now on, I saw something strange happen in the forest far below me.

The large, tall trees were rustling back and forth, falling one after another.

When I focused on it in wonderment of what was happening, my

hawk-like eyesight as a dragon allowed me to catch glimpses of a small girl dashing through the forest.

“Haah, haah, haah...!”

Her breathing was rough as she desperately ran through the forest.

Weaving her way through the trees, she slid under the root of a massive tree like it was some kind of archway.

Is she running from something—?

As if to confirm my thoughts, the massive tree’s trunk shook and cracked the instant I thought that. Just as I started to wonder what had caused it, the tree fell apart, exposing a dark red beast.

It’s wide with round ears and short limbs.

To relate it to an animal, I’d say it looks like a bear.

But what I’m seeing right now is obviously not the same kind of bear that I know, even to a non-animal expert like me.

Its body is easily longer than five meters.

It has thick and long claws that look like swords growing out of its bulky arms.

Scales were covering its body instead of hair. It looked like it was wearing heavy armor like an old war general.

Given its characteristic scales, let’s call it an Armored Bear. Even ignoring the fact that its claws just wrecked that tree, there’s no doubting that it’s a very dangerous creature. If that young girl gets hit by its paw, the only outcome would be her getting blown away in multiple pieces.

And it was closing the distance between them.

Pulverizing any and all obstacles with a swipe of its claws, the Armored Bear easily closed the gap that the girl ran so desperately

to create.

“Oh no...!”

Seeing the Armored Bear lift its arm up and imagining the inevitable result, I shouted out on reflex.

“... Eh...?”

My prediction was off the mark.

I stared at the spectacle occurring right before my very eyes.

Just when I thought that the girl was going to turn around and get hit, several trees started to move and block the Armored Bear's path.

They weren't much of an obstacle to the Armored Bear though, of course. However, the trees shot their leaves at the Armored Bear's face as it tried to bash away the branches to get at the girl. Their roots shot up out of the ground and twined themselves around its feet. The little girl made use of the time she had earned to run away like a rabbit.

—I'd never mistake it.

The thing that I'd yearned for my whole life.

Magic.

I'd never mistake what that small girl did in order to escape from the Armored Bear that dwarfed her in size.

Even though that wouldn't buy her much time either.

The girl's pace gradually slowed, and judging by how the trees stopped moving about as quickly, the magic she'd used had its limits as well.

... There's no way around it.

Seeing part of the girl's hair get cut away by the Armored Bear's

claws as it swiped at her, I made up my mind and flapped my wings. The girl's figure growing within my field of view as I drew closer, I broke a number of branches and landed in front of her.

“Ah—!?”

The girl's breath caught in her throat for a moment as she fell backwards onto the ground. She'd been running away from the Armored Bear for so long and saw a dragon appear out of no where, so it's not like I can't sympathize with her.

But to be honest, I also want to do the same.

Now that I'm seeing the Armored Bear stand on its hind legs up close... it's much bigger than I thought it'd be.

Even taking the fact I'm on all four into account, it's easily twice as big as me.

I might be a dragon, but I'm still just a ten year old juvenile. Mother could probably finish it off just by glaring at it, but for me it's like trying to stare down a mountain.

I shouldn't have butted in.

It's a bit late now, but I'm a bit... no, I'll be honest here.

I regret it from the bottom of my heart.

I'm no good when it comes to confrontation. I'd never even gotten into a fight in my previous life.

Even with my current body, it's just too much for me to have my first fight with what could easily be dubbed the Lord of the Forest.

But...

I glanced at the girl on the ground beside me. I can't be too accurate since this is the first time I've seen a human in this world, but I'd say she's somewhere between fourteen and fifteen going by the standards of my previous life.

There's no way I could abandon such a young girl. I couldn't abandon her all the more since she was someone that could use magic, something I've been searching for as long as I can remember.

“Hurry up and escape.”

I tried to say that while still keeping my focus on the Armored Bear, but as she hadn't so much as twitched, it appeared that the girl couldn't understand me. Even though I might've been able to escape into the sky if she'd just ran away...

My voice had the opposite effect I'd intended, though, as the Armored Bear appeared to take it as a form of intimidation and charged at me.

Not you!

I didn't have the time to say that as the Armored Bear closed the distance between us in a flash, its sharp claws hurling toward me.

It was so sudden that I couldn't even dodge. I instead shut my eyes out of reflex.

I heard a dull, cracking sound once the attack landed on my neck.

My neck hadn't caused the cracking sound. It was the Armored Bear's claws.

Staring at its claws, we were all dumbfounded. I mean, it's not like I'd done anything at all.

It's claws had simply been unable to withstand the force of it swinging all-out at my scales.

The first one to come back to their senses from that was, as expected, the Armored Bear.

It grabbed on to my shoulders with both of its forelegs as though it were about to embrace me. I recall hearing that the strongest muscle of not just bears, but practically all wildlife was located in their jaws. It had switched to its strongest method of attack the moment it realized that its claws didn't work on me.

“Aah!”

All I did in response to this Lord of the Forest coming at me with its strongest attack... was shout. Pathetically, even.

Even so, the Armored Bear cried out and separated from me in a panic. The area around its chest had been burned and white smoke wafted up from the area. I was confused for a moment as I tried thinking about what happened, but I figured it out quickly. It got hit by my breath.

Although a dragon's breath had more of a killer move vibe to it in the literary works of my previous life, that's just not how it is for this body I've reincarnated into.

It's not like it's a technique either. Just like how humans breathe in oxygen and breathe out carbon dioxide, Mother and I breathe out fire. Flames come out of my mouth just by me breathing normally. That's just the kind of creatures dragons are.

Still, judging by how that giant Armored Bear started leaping around and whining, it looks like the flames inside me are hotter than I thought they were.

I might be able to manage this somehow if I can damage it just by breathing. When I took a step forward toward the Armored Bear, it went onto all fours as well and looked as though it was going to charge me. So this is the spirit of a lord? It looks like it doesn't even care if it'll suffer a mortal wound.

Seeing the Armored Bear shoot at me like a bullet, I opened my mouth a small amount and let out a large breath. I'd practiced doing this a long time ago, so I knew that this would allow me to shoot out a more focused flame. I've been playing around with various kinds of flames ever since I was reincarnated as a dragon, after all.

But.

This was the first time I found out just how strong it was. That is, I'd never aimed my breath towards a living thing before. Smelling

the scent of charred Armored Bear in the air, I shuddered at the result of what I'd caused. It was blown backward, its head—and even its skull—gone.

When I looked at the girl next to me, she was staring at the Armored Bear's corpse, trembling.

She's probably wondering if it that is what is about to happen to her, I guess.

I gazed into her eyes as she looked at me with a frightened expression on her face.

A little while passed and she managed to calmed down somewhat.

[You—... you saved... me...?]

Unexpectedly, the girl opened her mouth and said something to me. It sounded like she'd asked me some sort of question, but I don't know what it was as she spoke in some language I'd never heard before.

“Don't be afraid. You're safe now.”

I spoke slowly with my face aimed at the ground. I'd lower my weapon if I had the body of a human to show that I'm not hostile, but unfortunately, my entire body is like a weapon right now. I at least put my chin against the ground so that she wouldn't see any fangs or flames.

[So you did save me...?]

Saying a few words that were slightly different just a moment ago, the girl approached me cautiously. With that, I finally noticed that she was somewhat different than the humans that I knew of.

The tips of her ears peeking out of her golden hair were tapered into points.

Her features, still left with much of their youthful innocence, were unbelievably well-ordered.

Her face was surprisingly small with blue, almond-shaped eyes situated beneath a pair of thin eyebrows. She had a strong nose with a cute pair of lips that reminded me of flower petals. She looked like she had a slender figure under what appeared to be some unprocessed silk-like material she was using as clothing. The color of her skin was more reminiscent of Northern Europeans than anything and her slender limbs made her look like a young model. Although she was dirty in a few places due to her earlier attempts at escaping that beast, it definitely wasn't enough to even begin to conceal her beauty.

She looked entirely like the elven race often described in my previous life's fiction stories.

Not daring to answer her, I waited to see what she was going to do.

[Warm...]

Placing her palm against my muzzle, she muttered something.

“Warm?”

Mimicking the sound she made, I spoke.



[Yeah, warm. So very... warm.]

She smiled like a blooming flower.

This was the moment I first met her—the moment I first met Nina.

Chapter 3: The Beginning Of It All

*The moment I realized that that point in time was destiny,
a long, long time had passed.*
—*The White Magus, Ai*

“Nina, have you ever seen a *human*?”

“What’s a *human*?”

The girl I’d saved from the Armored Bear, Nina, tilted her head upon hearing my sudden question.

Her response was reasonable enough. I’d pronounced the word in Japanese, the rest of my question being in whatever language she uses.

It’s been a few months since I met Nina. Since then, it’s somehow gotten to the point that we stay together, we’ve even become able to communicate with each other easily enough.

It appears that not only are dragons far stronger than humans, they’re also much faster learners.

As my hardware changed, so did my software, allowing me to become able to speak her language at a frightening speed.

“They look similar to you, but their ears are short and round... and they likely live in houses made out of wood or stone.”

The feeling of wanting to see humans has been building within me ever since the day I met Nina. Living as a dragon isn’t that bad, but I just can’t throw my humanity away.

“I know what you’re talking about... maybe?”

Which is why I all but floated into the sky when Nina said that.

“Could you show me where?”

She nodded when I asked her the question, so I had her get on my back and flapped my wings.

* * *

“Over there. Those are what you were talking about, right?”

I looked over to where Nina pointed and was surprised.

“Those are... the humans?”

“They look like me, have round ears, and live in a stone den. Are those them?”

Twitching her prided pointy ears, Nina thrust her flat chest out.

Well, she’s not wrong.

“... Setting aside whether or not they look like you, are there any humans that live like you?”

“It’s not like I know much about them, but the way they live is roughly the same as me.”

So that’s it... well, alright.

I looked back toward the scene Nina pointed out to me.

What I saw from the small hill we were on top of was a cave that opened up on the side of a mountain.

There were a few men carrying spears exiting from the cave, so it looked like they were about to go hunting. Each of their spears were made out of a long stick with a stone fastened to the end it. Both them and the group of women seeing them off were wearing nothing but beast fur. There were probably only several dozen people living there at most. The group of primitive humans were barely numerous enough to be called a settlement, let alone a village.

“What the...”

Magic existed, dragons soared through the skies, fairies lived, and mysteries suffused the world.

It’s a world that I can only describe as something straight out of a fairy tale, so I unconsciously started thinking that the level of civilization here would be around the same as medieval Europe.

But I was incredibly mistaken.

Now that I think about it carefully, the only reason I thought that it would be like that is because that’s how it was in fairy tales... it was also a common enough setting in light novels.

Rather, I should be thankful that there are even any humanoid creatures that I can communicate with. I would’ve been pretty depressed if this was a world filled with nothing but slimes.

But still...

Not really thinking about it, I sighed.

“Woah—hey, cut it out! Are you trying to kill me!?”

Nina jumped back quite a distance with her hands held up to protect her head.

“Oh, sorry.”

I hurriedly closed my mouth.

The most difficult thing about spending time with Nina is my breath.

Flames keep on coming out of my mouth even without me thinking about it, so I end up burning everything if I sigh like that.

“Maybe I should try talking to them...?”

“Eh, you’re going? Those guys don’t talk, they’re pretty aggressive.”

When I pulled myself together and muttered that, Nina gave me a warning.

“Well, that’d happen either way... probably. Nina, wait here for me, alright?”

Saying that and spreading my wings wide, I leapt into the sky.

I’m around two or three kilometers from those humans’ cave from the looks of it.

I haven’t been that confident in my sense of distance or time at all since my body turned into this, but it didn’t even take a minute for me to arrive in front of the cave.

A little girl just happened to be leaving the entrance as I arrived and looked up at me before screaming and falling to the floor.

“It’s okay, little miss. It’s okay, see? I’m a good dragon. I won’t eat—”

[Enemy!]

Spears shot toward me from all directions and interrupted me.

I see. She really wasn’t wrong when she called them aggressive.

I looked over them as their spears were repelled by my scales.

“I have no hostility toward you. Could you stop attacking me?”

[Run!]

I spoke especially slowly, but one of the men throwing spears shouted something. The women escaped into the cave with their children in tow.

Hmm, this is troubling.

“I. Not. Enemy. Understand?”

Speaking so that I wouldn’t breathe out as best I could, I used the tip of my muzzle to push the spears they’d thrown at me across the

ground to them. It'd be nice if this helps them understand that I'm not hostile.

The men looked at each other in bafflement, but they still came forward to take their spears timidly.

“You all still don't have a language yet, do you...”

That's what I was convinced of after analyzing the situation. They had only used short, command-like words. Like *attack that thing* and *run*. They still didn't have a language they could use to exchange more complex concepts.

Moreover, they'd only been throwing ordinary stone spears at me to attack. It looked like they didn't have anyone that could use magic like elves, at least.

“Sorry for alarming you all.”

Figuring out that we wouldn't be able to communicate, I once again took off into the sky after leaving them with a few words.

* * *

“How'd it go?”

“Not well. They couldn't understand me at all.”

“Told you so.”

Seeing me shake my head, Nina smiled for some reason.

“Even though I thought I'd finally be able to meet humans...”

“Hey, don't aim that stuff at me!”

Ah, whoops. I wound up sighing again.

“Sorry. It's just normal breathing for me...”

“You can't just burn down the forest out of thoughtlessness.”

Nina spoke with her hands placed on her hips.

“And even if you can’t meet them... am I not enough?”

Nina pouted as she muttered that.

Her voice dwindled away to the point it was barely even a whisper at the end there, but dragons have needlessly good hearing. I heard everything as clear as crystal.

“Well, it doesn’t feel like it’ll be impossible with you here, Nina...”

I really don’t have any confidence in myself when it comes to communicating with a group of primitives that don’t even have a language. However, when I said that despite feeling somewhat gloomy about it, Nina’s mood improved visibly.

“The sun’s about gone, let’s call it a day and get some rest.”

Saying that and extending her arm, a tree spontaneously lowered its boughs. Elven magic.

Nina took off her clothes and tossed them across a tree’s branch before laying down in the newly-made bed of leaves.

“I told you that that’s *immodest*.”

Laying down and not covered at all, her body’s brilliantly white skin was dazzling to my eyes. With her well-proportioned body despite her youth, she was at an age that made it hard for me to be troubled over where I should look.

“And I keep asking: what does *immodest* mean?”

I was as stumped on how to answer her as always.

The language Nina uses has no concept of immodesty. I mean, her race doesn’t even have a word for embarrassment. Clothing is simply something meant to protect them from the cold, so nakedness isn’t something they feel ashamed about at all.

“C’mon, hurry up.”



“Yeah, yeah...”

She held her arms out towards me and beckoned me over. Trying my best not to look at her body, I headed over to her and surrounded her bed by coiling myself around it.

As a fire dragon, my body was warm. It's more comfortable for her like this, according to her. I'm a bit worried that I might accidentally let out a big sigh when I'm sleeping, though.

But still, I realized something when I tried meeting those humans.

That is, an elf's lifestyle isn't so different from their way of living. I could easily write it off as them being a forest race, but they generally don't build any houses, sleep on simple bedding, and live off of animals, nuts, and berries. They also hunt and scavenge if pressed, but aren't they basically primitives as well?

They can sustain themselves even with that kind of lifestyle, of course. Through their ability to manipulate trees with magic and listen to their voices to find food, they're able to live so long as the forest still exists. I get the feeling that that's actually hindering their cultural development, though. Since they're able to live so easily, they have no need to advance or develop anything new. I've also got the feeling that they'll end up being surpassed by mankind and eventually brought to ruin.

The same concept applies to me as well. Dragons are strong to the point of being abnormal. We don't have any problems with hunting prey, nor do we have any natural predators. We are probably at the top of the food chain. But our livelihood is supported solely by hunting. Not something that could be called a civilization at all.

I doubt that civilization itself even exists in this world yet.

This is a world still in its primitive era.

Even though I have knowledge of a world far, far in the future compared to this one, it all amounts to nothing without the groundwork of civilization and its infrastructure to make use of it. The current human race can barely even make use of words, much less a full language... so even passing on my knowledge to others through books is impossible.

It's a terrifying loneliness.

Nobody knows me, nor can they understand me. We can't even

communicate.

I can speak with Nina, yes, but she has such a foreign outlook on everything that just talking with her has made me realize just how different of a creature she is from me.

And with that, I finally realized: no matter what kind of mystery there is, no matter how wonderful a discovery I find is, there's no meaning to it without someone to share it with.

Am I, once again, not going to understand anything, not leave anything behind... and live my life in futility?

—Just like my previous life.

The moment I cursed myself in bitterness, an idea flashed into my mind like I'd been given a divine revelation.

“An academy!”

“Wh-what's wrong!?”

Accidentally spouting the words that should've been kept in my mind out of sheer excitement, Nina sprung to her feet in surprise.

“An *academy*, Nina. I'm going to build an *academy*!”

Elvish didn't have the word for academy, of course, but I told her what I was thinking about all the same.

If it doesn't exist, I just have to make it.

If there's no place to teach others, I just have to create one.

—A place where I can teach it all.

This was the beginning of a very, very long—long to the point of being ridiculous—story.

Chapter 4: A Dragon's Breath

*Each time I exhale, a blessing escapes.
... Literally.*

The next day.

“Morning...”

Nina rubbed the sleepiness from her eyes as she spoke, her mouth wide open due to yawning.

“Good morning.”

Still trying not to look at her butt-naked body to my utmost, I greeted her back.

“Still tired... you were so noisy last night...”

“Sorry.”

Complaining, she held out her hands and the trees shook as they inclined their leaves toward her, having the dew on them drip into her palms. Once Nina was done washing her face, wind blew away the remaining water on her face. Next, the silk she'd tossed over on the tree branch floated over to Nina, wrapped around her body, and turned into clothing.

As ever, magic is a magnificent thing.

I decided to call her race elves for convenience's sake. It's just for convenience because, be it their abilities, lifestyle, or physical characteristics, they differed heavily from the design laid out by the great 20th century novelist named Tolkien—they even differed from the variety of elves that existed within Norse mythology, the álfir.

I guess it might have been more accurate to call them dryads or nymphs, but there's no reason I have to match it with Earth's mythology either way. She lives in this world and is an existence of

this world, after all.

“So what was that think you were on about? An *academy*?”

“Yeah. I’d like you to help me build one, Nina.”

Typing up her golden hair with blades of grass, she asked me about what I brought up last night.

I nodded—her cooperation was imperative for the academy I pictured.

“I don’t really mind.”

Elves seemed to live very monotonous lives.

That’s also the reason she was even associating with a strange dragon like me. I also think that it’s because it meant that she’d be able to live without having to work, though.

“What is that *academy* thing, anyway?”

“An academy is a place you live at for a long time, somewhere to teach youths about the world. Your parents taught you about the world, right?”

“Well... yeah.”

Tilting her head to the side as she recalled her past, she nodded.

“Humans are a race much younger than yours. When it comes to what they need to survive, they know next to nothing. I will build a magic academy and teach them magic.”

“... *Magic*?”

Magic was another word that didn’t exist in Elvish. Nina repeated the word I’d spoken in Japanese back to me.

“Nina, you know how you manipulate trees? That’s magic.”

“Eh—”

Her eyes opened wide in surprise.

“Teach, you say... how?”

She looked as though she had no idea how that could be done.

“Nina, how do you do it?”

“How...?”

Saying that, Nina looked over to a tree and extended her arm toward it.

The tree rustled and moved to place a branch on her palm almost exactly like she'd given it a command to [Shake] like one might give to a dog.

“Like that.”

Nina knit her brows, troubled. She didn't have any further explanation to give me.

I see. I guess that to her, moving trees is like moving her own limbs.

“I mean, you'd be stumped if I asked you how you breathe fire, right?”

“Ah. So that's magic, too, then.”

It's rather obvious now that I think about it. Breathing is something done to take in oxygen, how would I be able to do that if my lungs were filled with fire? It's simply impossible. So, obviously, that has to be magic as well.

But she is right, though. I wouldn't be able to explain to her how I'm breathing out fire. It's just like breathing normally to me. I myself don't even feel the heat from it. That fact often causes me to forget that I breathe fire, though.

“Nina. Can you move your arms without moving trees along with them?”

“Yup.”

When I thought of something and gave asking Nina about it a shot, she quickly held up her arm. As expected, it appears as her action itself isn't the requirement for it. In other words, I should be able to both breathe fire and not breathe fire.

“Could you try moving them this time?”

“Sure.”

This time, Nina just looked at them without changing her stance.

A tree branch squirmed, shaking up and down.

“What did you do different?”

“Umm, I... imagined it?”

So it's all about the image, is it? Let's give it a shot.

I closed my eyes and imagined myself from before I reincarnated, back when I still had the body of a human.

A body standing on two legs. A back with no wings. An upright neck.

I breathed in slowly, the air filling me lunged.

Then, keeping that image in my head... I breathed out.

“Kyaah!? What're you doing!?”

“Ah! Sorry!”

Panicking, I beat out the flames that had started to spread into the trees.

It seems like doing it right won't be easy.

The firewood crackled, making popping noises.

“So you do eat meat, huh...”

“Hmm? Did you say something?”

Nina was digging in to some roasted deer meat, enjoying its flavor immensely.

“You don’t think that it’s pitiful or anything, do you?”

“Huh?”

Hearing my question, Nina tilted her head to the side and replied like I’d just said something weird.

“Ah, sorry. It’s nothing.”

I guess that’s the normal response? That kind of thinking is something that only more plentiful societies would have. But it’s really surreal seeing a dainty elf chow down ravenously on a hunk of roasted meat.

I say that, but I’m even worse in terms of sophistication.

Having a dragon’s body even changed my sense of taste, so things taste delicious even if they’re raw.

Juices ooze out of the meat when it gets burned by the flames in my throat. It’s extremely delicious.

Munching on the deer meat, I thought about magic.

It seems that this world’s magic isn’t something that requires incantations or motions to invoke. It’s simply as natural as breathing.

Being able to freely manipulate something that I’d liken to an imaginary arm is difficult.

Watching the flowers that somehow managed to not get burned, I held back my desire to sigh.

I was able to get to the point that I could freely move my wings about though.

I had neither wings nor a tail back when I was a human, so they were puzzling things to me when I was born.

But I got used to them after a few years, I don't even have any discomfort from them at this point. I'm now able to use them as naturally as I can use my hands.

... Hmm?

I suddenly questioned my own thoughts.

... Is it really like moving an imaginary arm?

Right now, I have wings so that I may soar through the skies, scales so that I may protect my body, and fangs so that I may chew deers whole.

If that's how it is...

Isn't there also some organ within my body so that I may breath fire?

I closed my eyes once more.

This time, I pictured myself not as a human, but as a dragon.

Where is the source of my fire?

In my throat?

No. That deer meat I ate earlier was being burned even after passing through my throat.

Then is it in my lungs?

But flames still flicker out of my mouth even if I stop breathing.

In that case... in my abdomen? The moment I thought of that, I felt something strange.

Like there was something hot located near my stomach.

Picturing myself blocking that off, I looked down and breathed

out.

The flowers blooming before me fluttered, no fire to be seen.

Chapter 5: The Sacrifice

*Since time immemorial, gifts given
to that man have been cursed.
Cursed in that they cannot be returned.*

“I did it! Nina, check it out!”

Seeing me so excited about something, Nina looked at me strangely.

“... What did you do?”

“Can’t you tell by looking?”

My eyes still wide open in surprise, I pointed at my feet with a finger on one of my forelegs.

There were a few centimeters’ gap between my feet and the ground.

“I’m flying right now!”

“You’ve been doing that since I met you though?”

Nina’s response to me—still uncontrollably excited—was rather indifferent.

“So you can’t tell... what I’m doing right now is *floating*.”

“What’s the difference?”

I’m stumped on how to respond, honestly. There’s no expression capable of easily making the distinction in Elvish.

“I mean... oh, see how I’m staying in the same spot even without flapping my wings? I’m not flying like a bird, I’m just drifting in the air like a leaf in a pond.”

“What’s so good about that?”

Nina's simple question put me at a loss for words.

If I had to pick between good and incredible, what I'm doing right now is by far incredible.

"It's magic, Nina. This is magic, too."

I can't say I know just how heavy a dragon's body is, but there's at least one thing that's clear.

The lift that my wings produce definitely isn't enough to support my massive body.

I'm still fairly young as a dragon, yet my body is at least two heads taller than Nina. I'm probably around three meters tall if you included everything to the tip of my tail.

So I'm much, much larger than a bird, let alone my mother, who's easily ten times my size. Common sense would dictate that things like us couldn't fly.

Given that I can do something that shouldn't be possible, magic has to have something to do with it.

And my hopes hit the mark rather magnificently.

"Weren't you happy about *not* using magic just a bit ago?"

"That was for fire. See? I'm not breathing out fire at all anymore."

I deliberately exhaled in Nina's direction.

"... Yeah... I-looks like you stopped breathing fire..."

"S-sorry!"

My breath caused Nina to tremble all over and to have to reign in her now-disheveled hair, so I quickly apologized.

"And you're going to teach that magic thing?"

"Yeah."

“How?”

Given the same question she'd asked last night, I suddenly noticed...

—I still hadn't solved that problem at all.

All I'd done was become able to purposely use magic.

“I'm beat, I give up.”

I smiled wryly and Nina stared at me pointedly.

“What's up?”

“Weirdo.”

Nina suddenly looked away when she noticed I'd started staring back at her.

“You said you give up, but you don't look stumped at all.”

“Eh, no, I really am stumped...”

“Liaaar.”

Nina looked back toward me and pointed at my mouth, an innocent smile on her face.

“You've been grinning ever since last night!”

When I reached for my mouth because of her pointing it out, there really was a smile on my face.

Yeah... this is what it feels like.

“I'm happy that I'm stumped.”

My previous life didn't have magic, so it wasn't even possible for me to be stumped like this.

Being stumped means that there's a problem.

There being a problem means that there's room for trial and error.

And what a wonderful thing that is!

"Weirdo."

I hadn't conveyed my thoughts to Nina, but she was able to guess most of it just by seeing how delighted I must look and repeated the same thing as before yet again.

Nina's expression suddenly turned serious as she turned around.

"... Something's coming."

I wonder if Nina's perception is some sort of magic as well? She's keen enough to find a rabbit hiding in the brush.

Although a dragon's perception is considerably sharp compared to a human's, I only noticed by the point they'd practically arrived.

"You guys..."

The people that arrived were the humans that I tried to contact a few days ago.

They were two of the men that threw spears at me and the girl that I'd landed right in front of. I didn't take myself for someone that could remember people's faces too well, but a dragon's memory is a fearsome thing indeed.

I even managed to remember their faces despite only catching a glimpse of them.

The men were somewhere between thirty and forty years old from the looks of it. They had solid builds, but weren't too tall. They were only a little taller than Nina, so maybe around a hundred and sixty centimeters or so?

They definitely seemed to be warriors given their spears and the structure of their fur clothing, but it didn't feel like they intended to attack. Placing Nina behind me just in case, I looked to see what

they would do.

The two men suddenly knelt, leaving the girl standing.

[Offer.]

It was short, but the word clearly held some meaning.

With that, the men stood and left the girl as they dashed away.

“Uhh...”

Left behind, the girl looked up at me and trembled.

The girl was even younger than Nina. She looked to be around ten or so.

With her black hair, yellow skin, and shallow facial features, she looked similar to the Japanese I’m familiar with.

Although this era didn’t have elaborate clothing, her hair was decorated by flowers and she wore a necklace made out of carved turquoise-colored stones. She was obviously decorated for a specific reason.

“I guess... this is *that*, isn’t it...”

“A sacrifice.”

Nina said the word I was thinking out loud.

“I wonder if we can send her back...”

“I guess they want you to kill her to appease your anger?”

“I’m not even angry though...”

I was excited about seeing humans for the first time back then, but now that I think about it... I did soar down from the sky with both fire and a loud voice roaring from my mouth.

It can’t be helped that that caused them to think I’m angry.

“Don’t worry, I’m not going to eat you.”

I spoke slowly so that I might calm the trembling girl down.

“Your name is...?”

Oh, she doesn’t have one, does she? They still haven’t even developed a language to communicate with, after all.

“Right. Ai. From this day forward, your name is Ai.”

A name that’s short and easy to pronounce should be easier for a child to learn.

“A-i...”

Ai blinked in puzzlement when I called her with her name a few times before clumsily imitating me.

“It’s good to meet you, Ai. If you are willing—”

With mine and Nina’s abilities, we shouldn’t have a problem with our daily lives even if we have to take care of another person.

But more importantly, this meeting of ours might actually be a good thing.

“Would you be my first human pupil?”

Chapter 6: His First Pupil



*That's one small step for man,
one giant leap for mankind.*
—Neil Armstrong

“Welcome, back. Mentor.”

Her face full of smiles, Ai ran over to me when I landed at the forest's entrance.

“I'm back. But Ai, you shouldn't leave the forest.”

“You didn't say that she couldn't greet you. And besides, she's still barely in the forest, it's alright.”

Nina popped up from behind Ai, sighing.

This world was filled with dangerous animals.

Although there weren't many fierce beasts like the Armored Bear, there are many animals that could be dangerous to a young girl like Ai in both the forest and the grasslands outside of it.

They'd be able to stay out of danger so long as they're in the forest because of what Nina can do, but I get worried when they're at the forest's boundary like right now. But although I get worried

—
“Mentor... did I, do bad...?”

“No, you did well. Thank you for coming to greet me.”

I just couldn't find it in me to berate Ai after seeing her get so dejected like that and forgave her.

... Which caused her face to light up into a smile as she clung to my muzzle.

“What was this kind of thing called again... a [Doting Dummy]?”

Nina snorted as she poked fun at me.

I only said that term one time... good job on remembering.

What she spoke with and what I've been teaching Ai wasn't Elvish, but Japanese.

I was a bit troubled over which language I wanted to teach Ai.

If I went with Japanese, I'd have to teach it to Nina as well.

But I decided on teaching her Japanese even after taking the disadvantages into consideration.

I mean, there is a remarkable difference in the amount of vocabulary between Elvish and Japanese.

Elvish uses simple ways to express things and is staggeringly restrictive for more complex matters.

For example, there isn't a word that means [Word]. There aren't even any other languages, after all. It has neither [Magic] nor [Academy] and even lacks words for [Elf] and [Human].

I wouldn't be able to run an academy with that many limitations.

I'd just been substituting Japanese words into Elvish for words it didn't have, but I felt that it would be faster to just have her to learn Japanese itself.

Which is why I taught the two of them Japanese. They still falter a bit when they speak, but it's gotten to the point that they're able to have everyday conversations without being too troubled. It didn't happen in a simple few days like it did when I learned Japanese, but it has been several months since I first began teaching them. They're both astoundingly fast learners.

"Nina-san. Mentor, not a dummy."

Ai started puffing out her cheeks in anger.

The girl who'd trembled in fear at the mere sight of me had grown very attached to me these past few months.

"No, I mean that he's wonderful at *that*."

Meanwhile, Nina was the same as ever.

It feels like she's grown attached to me as well, though.

"What do you mean, *that*?"

"Alright you two, stop quarreling. How about we have some lunch?"

Saying that, I held up the fish basket I was carrying on my foreleg.

Although dragon forefeet are surprisingly dexterous, it's not to the point of being able to weave baskets.

The basket was made by Nina.

"Let's head home."

Yes, home. The era of us living with tree boughs as our roof has long since come to an end.

It isn't much to look at, but we have a house.

It's not far off from the forest's entrance and was surrounded by some sporadically placed trees.

We made the house out of wood, so it's simple, yet sturdy. It doesn't even break when I enter it either.

Well, although it is large enough that I'm able to move around inside it without being inconvenienced, I probably won't be able to fit sooner or later, given how mother's size makes it appear that dragons continue growing forever and how I'm already larger than a horse.

But that's not all. It's all made from wood, but we have furniture, too.

Nina took out an unglazed pot as Ai arranged our dishes on the table.

What a civilized sight this is.

It's an incredible leap in progress compared to the time we were eating roasted deer outside.

"Alright, roast it."

"Yeah."

I blew a few minor flames out onto the fishes she'd stuck sticks through to skewer them. I'd caused quite a lot of our meats to burn into nothing at first and had even almost burned down our house at one point, but I've since gotten used to doing it.

Grilled in the blink of an eye, a fragrant smell spread through the house.

That done, Nina started to sprinkle some salt that she'd gotten from the pot onto it all.

"Now then."

"Well."

"Yeah."

"" Time to eat! ""

Our voices overlapped.

Picking up a skewer with the tips of my toes and placing it on my tongue, I threw it back into my mouth and ate it all at once. An irresistible umami flavor spread through my mouth as the grease and salt mixed together.

“It’s so good!”

“Hey! Be careful!”

“Whoops, excuse me.”

Nina shouted at the sight of me accidentally flaming at the mouth.

I’ve gotten to the point I can just about control the flames, but they sometimes make their way out when I get excited.

“It just means the fish you salted was so tasty that my fire wanted some too.”



“How irresponsible, really now.”

Nina puffed out her cheeks.

Seeing us like that, Ai giggled.

“By the way, Ai, is there anything inconveniencing you in everyday life?”

“Incon... venien...?”

Whoops, I haven’t taught her that word yet, have I?

“Sorry, I mean—is there anything that’s troubling you or hard for you to do?”

She’s living apart from her parents despite still being so young, after all.

There should at least be one or two things like that.

“No, none.”

But even so, she just shook her head.

“Mentor, I, umm...”

She started trying to say something, but she probably still didn’t have the vocabulary to say what she wanted to.

“Umm, umm...”

She kept trying to find the words for it.

“I understand. Just let me know if you find something difficult, alright?”

“Yeah!”

Ai nodded cheerfully. What a good kid.

But that’s exactly why I have to be more careful.

“Incidentally, how is your magic practice going?”

I asked Ai another question as I ate some fruit Nina had fetched for dessert once our meal was over.

“Sorry... I still, can’t use.”

“It’s okay, it’s nothing worth worrying about.”

Seeing Ai fall despondent, I quickly did a follow up.

Even I can’t do anything other than breathe fire and float a bit.

Life itself has been smooth sailing, but my research into magic hasn’t advanced at all.

“Isn’t breathing fire and flying in the sky something only you can do?”

What Nina pointed out put me at a loss for words.

It’s true, I hadn’t thought of the possibility of that.

I’d had Ai test out various things, but none of it bore fruit.

“It’s okay, I’ll try my best.”

Ai spoke bravely.

While on one hand that made me feel grateful, it made me a bit sorry on the other.

But still, the only thing I can do for this world’s humans is teach them about magic.

The scientific age I lived in had a highly specialized division of labor as its norm. Very few people actually understood how the whole of something worked. There probably wasn’t even a single person that could reproduce something without already having all of the materials and infrastructure needed.

Even if I managed to make a house out of wood, I don’t know how to use a furnace to smelt iron, nor how to refine oil, nor how to design an electronic circuit, nor how to make a quantum computer.

When it comes to magic, however...

When it comes to magic, who in this world would know it better

than me?

To quote Arthur C. Clarke, a famous twentieth century science fiction writer: “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”

Assuming that that’s true, any magic should be indistinguishable from sufficiently advanced technology as well.

As a matter of fact, the magic that causes my hefty body to float is indistinguishable from the recently developed quantum levitation techniques from my previous life.

If I can use magic to do it, even someone like me should be able to develop a civilization.

“Couldn’t Ai do it more like how I do? She looks like me, after all.”

A strand of ivy crept in through the window and twined around the finger Nina held up.

“Maybe... but I get the feeling that creating fire should be easier than manipulating plants.”

Besides, the problem is that Nina practically can’t explain the feeling she has when she uses magic at all.

“What’s a *plant*?”

The two got caught up by another matter as they both tilted their heads to the side.

“Trees, grass, flowers. That kind of stuff.”

They simply tilted their heads all the more when I answered, though.

“Huh? Why would you call different things the same name?”

Nina’s question surprised me for a moment. She still hadn’t understood the notion of generic terms yet?

“It’s because of convenience. We give things that have similar characteristics or appearances a broad term that cover them all. For example, things that are able to move about and think like all of us are called living things. Deer and fish are living things, as well. Stuff like stones or water are not. They are materials.”

“Hmm...”

Nina understood me, but it looked like Ai was still trying to figure out what I meant judging by the serious expression on her face.

“But that means what I move aren’t plants. I can’t move [Trees That Have Shed Their Winter Leaves] and [Branches That Have Been Cut Off].”

The two things Nina listed off there were names for kinds of trees and wood in Elvish.

There were countless ways to say things related to flora in Elvish, each having slight nuances to them.

Kind of like how Japanese has a decent amount of ways to define rain.

“That so? That means you can only move trees that are still alive then?”

“Living? Trees, are alive, too?”

“Obviously not.”

Nina retorted to Ai’s simple question, but I nodded my head.

“Trees and plants are different kinds of living things. It’s not like trees die when they shed their leaves for the winter... I guess it’s more like they are asleep?”

“Living, things... plants...”

Ai fumbling over the words I said as she repeated them to herself.

“But then why can’t you move the grass sprouting out of the

ground?”

“It’s because they don’t have that stuff—bones.”

Nina spoke like it was common knowledge as she sat there eating an apple.

Bones... well, I kind of get what she was trying to say, at least.

“I don’t think trees have bones either though...?”

“Then what’s that stuff that’s left over when you burn it?”

“Charcoal.”

“Umm... Mentor?”

It had happened at the point we ran off into a tangent.

“Is this... okay?”

Within Ai’s cupped hands was a leaf moving to and fro.

Chapter 7: The Origin of Magic

*Then God said, “Let there be light,”
and there was light.*

—The Old Testament, Genesis 1:3

“How did you do that!?”

“I-I don’t know.”

When I moved my head over to Ai in excitement, Ai looked at me, her body frozen as though she was frightened.

“Hey, settle down.”

My horn suddenly yanked by Nina, I calmed down.

“Sorry. Did I frighten you?”

“No...”

Ai had put her hand over her heart like she was trying to keep it from exploding out of her chest.

Even if she’s gotten accustomed to me, I really do look like a terrifying dragon.

Of course she would react like that when I get closer to her so suddenly.

I wind up forgetting about it since I can’t see myself, but I have to be mindful of it.

“It’s alright, let’s go through it piece by piece, okay? Are you able to stop doing it?”

“Yeah.”

Following Ai’s response, the leaf that was dancing about on her hand stopped moving.

“Can you do it once again?”

“Umm... this, okay?”

“Amazing...!”

Seeing the leaf start moving again, I let out a sigh of admiration.

“Hey! Don’t I keep telling you about your fire!?”

“Whoops, sorry.”

“Come on! Are you trying to burn down our house after all the effort we put into it!?”

“No, really, I’m sorry.”

I apologized to Nina, who was standing there and scolding me with her hands on her hips.

“But Nina, this is a huge step in the history of magic. It’d be impossible for me to not be excited.”

“What are you talking about? Can’t I do that too?”

Holding up her hand, a tree branch came in through the window, making rustling sounds all the while.

“Ai, can you do the same thing as her?”

“I will, try.”

Knitting her brows as she focused, Ai performed a gesture that looked like she was praying. With that, the branch that Nina had guided inside began to move slowly and awkwardly.

As would be expected, there was a noticeable difference in its precision between Ai and the more experienced Nina.

“Do you think that you could explain how you did it for me?”

Ai looked somewhat troubled when I asked her that question.

“Umm... like this...”

After moving her hands around like she wanted to demonstrate something, her shoulders drooped.

“I can’t, say it...”

“I can’t explain how I do mine either, so please don’t worry about it, alright?”

Trying to explain the sensation behind using magic would be like telling someone to explain how they move their arms. It’s something extremely difficult to put into words and is something that you’d have to experience with your own body.

Even if I don’t understand how it’s used right now, just knowing that it can be done is easily an extremely important step in the right direction.

“Now, Ai, how about this one?”

I held up a finger and carefully emitted a flame from its tip.

Not from my mouth, but from my fingertip.

“Eh? When did you start being able to do that?”

“Just recently.”

I’d suddenly had a thought: if my ability to produce flames is due to magic, doesn’t that mean that it doesn’t have to be emitted from within my throat?

Of course, if it wasn’t magic and I was simply born with some sort of gas pouch that I could ignite whenever I want within my body, I shouldn’t be able to do something like this.

Still though, this world’s magic truly is magical. It’s incredibly similar to my previous world’s ignition reactions. In that case, shouldn’t I be able to produce fire from places other than my mouth?

Thinking that, I'd decided to give it a shot. It turned out being considerably smaller than when I exhale it from my mouth, but I am in fact able to emit fire from my fingers.

"Mmm~..."

One again squinching her brows, Ai stared at the tip of her finger rather fixedly.

Nina and I watched her attentively as we gulped back our saliva in anticipation, but one, then five, then ten minutes passed without even a spark appearing.

"Sorry..."

"No no no, it's nothing to worry about. Fire and trees are completely different things, there's no way it would happen so easily."

Her shoulders drooping, I comforted Ai with as gentle a tone I could muster.

I'd honestly like to pat her on the shoulder, but my clawed hands might just end up fearing her again. Having a dragon's body is difficult.

"Hey, which one is that?"

Unexpectedly, Nina asked me a question.

"What do you mean, which?"

Her eyes were staring at my hand.

"That. The fire. It's part of you, so it's a living thing? Or is it a material?"

"Oh, that... it's energy."

Let's see, how should I explain energy?

Organizing my thoughts, I tried explaining it to them without

distorting the facts too much.

“Energy...”

“Ener, gy...”

With it being a borrowed word from English, they repeated the word back to themselves.

I thought about keeping it in Japanese with words like power, work, or force, but I gave up on that after figuring out that I’d run into an impasse sooner or later. It’s probably going to turn into me having them wrack their brains and learn another alphabet, but there’s no other choice than to just do it.

“Energy is neither a living thing nor is it a material... it’s shapeless, the power needed to do an action. Take this for example...”

I placed my hands under Nina’s armpits and carefully lifted her up so that I wouldn’t scrape her with my claws.

“What I used to lift Nina up just now was a force I exerted... and her going back down when I let go is due to the ground always exerting a force that pulls us down toward it.”

“Don’t just go and use me for your explanation without asking... I don’t really mind though.”

Landing back onto the ground as quietly as a cat, Nina puffed her cheeks out.

I’ve seen her jump down from a few surprisingly high places, is she able to do that because elves live in trees, or is it yet another variety of magic? She also appears to like tall places, she didn’t even look mad even though I used her as teaching materials on my own accord.

“Force... energy...”

“For fire, its energy is in the form of both light and heat. It lights things up and feels hot, yeah? Those are both forms of energy and is

what we call fire when they happen together.”

I was a bit uncomfortable with the explanation I gave. Although my lecture was rather inadequate as an explanation, Ai payed attention to it all the way through with keen interest. My area of study was of the occult, I’ve only learned the basic amount when it comes to science. I’m not confident in being able to explain any further than this.

“Energy...”

But luckily, Ai closed her eyes and muttered the word again, not pursuing the topic.

“Ai? What are you...”

It happened the moment I noticed something about how she was acting and bent in toward her face.

“Woah!”

“Gyaah!”

Seeing the flames flickering up from her palms, both Nina and I shouted at the same time.

The house we’d built large enough for me to live in easily even with my huge body was around four meters tall. The flame was big enough that it reached even our house’s tall ceiling.

“Ai, put it out! Quick!”

“Eh, h-ho-how—”

“Uhh, like this!”

Glomp.

All three of us panicking, I acted on impulse and put out the flame Ai produced.

My body was extraordinarily resistant to heat, so I figured that at

least the fire wouldn't spread if I put it into my mouth.

"Are... are you okay?"

Nina asked me in a trembling voice.

It looks like I was able to put out the fire, thankfully.

"I'm alright... or rather..."

What did this mean?

"You're not in pain? Are you sure you didn't get hurt?"

I wonder how strange of an expression I have on right now. It was at least strange enough that Nina looked to be on the verge of tears just by looking at me. When I looked over to Ai, she was trembling with a pale face, too.

"I'm alright, really. There's nothing wrong with me, so please, don't worry."

When I carefully placed a fingertip on each of the two girls' shoulders, they both let out a breath and seemed to calm down.

"Ai, could you try creating that flame again?"

"B-but..."

"It's alright. I'll just eat it again if there's a problem."

Seeing her nod, it looks like me saying it with a deliberately gentle tone managed to convince her that it's alright.

She then closed her eyes the same as earlier and caused a flame to appear above her palm.

It's a surprisingly adorable fireball compared to last time, I wonder if that's because she was being careful this time?

"... So it's like that after all, huh?"

Seeing the flame again, I was convinced about it.

“Nina, try touching it.”

“What!?”

“It’s alright. It’s not very hot.”

I put my forefoot into Ai’s flames.

“That’s because you’re a fire dragon!”

“U-umm... not, hot. Really.”

Ai spoke falteringly. She’s the one emitting the fire above her palm, so she’d also noticed that it wasn’t hot.

“See? ... It doesn’t even burn the leaves on this.”

I broke off a part of the branch that Nina had moved inside earlier and placed it into the spire. The flames just continued to flicker uneventfully, not spreading to the leaves.

“... It’s true. Although it’s not... cold, it’s lukewarm.”

Nina looked curious when she spoke after timidly putting her hand into the fire.

My body won’t get burned by flames, but it’s not like I don’t feel heat. Rather, it feels like I can tell how hot something is or isn’t much more accurately than I could as a human.

As I said, the flames Ai made were awfully cold. About the temperature of water at room temperature.

“I see. I’m slowly starting to understand...”

I didn’t tell Ai something important when I explained what fire was to her earlier.

That something... is combustion.

The reason I hadn’t explained it is because I’m not knowledgeable enough to be able to explain it in simple terms, but as a result of that, the fire Ai had produced was just a bundle of light and heat

that didn't truly combust... in short, it turned into [Something That Only Looks Like Fire].

In other words, things brought forth by magic depended greatly on the perception of the person creating them.

So then, what does it mean to perceive?

“Could you two move that tree over there?”

I pointed to a different tree.

Even while tilting their heads in confusion, Ai and Nina moved their hands over in the tree's direction—

And only the branch Nina had pointed her hand to appeared to move, verifying my thoughts.

“Ai, let me teach you something else.”

I thought about how I should say it. There wasn't a name to call this one in Japanese. It did exist in Elvish though, fortunately.

“This kind of tree is called a *fuggi*.”

“*Fuggi*...”

The instant Ai spoke that word, the branch she was holding her hand out towards trembled.

This was evidence that, just now, her horizons had broadened.

—Yes.

This world's magic was one comprised of names.

Chapter 8: Talent

Practice is the best of all instructors.
—Publilius Syrus

“We call the force that pulls things down towards the ground gravity.”

“Gravity...”

Repeating what I said, Ai wrote it down.

It’s still extremely primitive, but what we’re doing right now is having a class.

Although Ai has already mastered the alphabet, she’s still working on her digraphs.

As a result of thinking about whether I should teach her how to write or whether I should research magic, I decided to do both together. I believe that writing is important for her to remember things that I teach her, after all.

Still though, it went in an unexpected direction.

“Alright, now go ahead and try turn gravity off. If you do, you should be able to float in the air like me.”

“Okay!”

Ai gazed at the wooden board she’d written on a moment ago in earnest.

“Gravity, off. Gravity, off. Gravity... off...!”

After chanting to herself a few times, her body suddenly began to float.

It wasn’t by much, but her body had definitely unshackled itself from gravity’s chains.

I folded my outstretched wings back and sighed in relief.

“Why were your wings spread out?”

“Just in case.”

I was afraid that she might’ve suddenly shot into the sky at orbital speeds after completely turning gravity off. That obviously doesn’t appear to be the case, though.

I already know that this world is the same as the Earth in that it is a planet spinning through space. By looking towards the horizon when I am flying in the sky, I can see that the world is round as well as see that there is a moon rotating around this planet, which is itself rotating around the sun.

By the way, Nina accepted that as fact unexpectedly easily when I told her about it.

I’m not sure if it’s because her comprehension is great or if it’s because she doesn’t have much in the way of prior knowledge prejudicing her from new ideas, though.

“Good, you did well.”

“Yeah! Thanks to the words, Mentor taught!”

Ai smiled in delight, hugging the wooden board tightly.

It appears that names are extremely important in magic. No matter how hard someone tries, it is impossible to use magic to move something that they haven’t named. The world expands through the amount of names you know, allowing you to do more things. Also, it seems that there is a force within the word that strengthens the action.

I’m not actually sure if there is a force in the words used or if it’s because it makes it easier to picture mentally, but the success rate of Ai’s magic had definitely improved after she understood the concept through writing.

Although there was some magic that wouldn’t show much of an

effect even when I taught her initially taught her the names, there hadn't been a single one that hadn't at least shown some result after she learned how to write them.

“Dinner's done, you two~”

When Ai and I were happy about her magic succeeding, Nina's voice came down from the sky.

Seeing the girl waving her hand with her small body soaring through the sky, Ai's smile quickly clouded over.

Thinking about it, she'd just barely gotten to the point she could float and Nina's already flying about freely, not just floating.

It appears that even magic is something that relies on talent—or is at least something with individual variation.

It's not as though we could make a simply comparison between the three of us since we weren't born or raised the same at all, but Nina is definitely the best among us when it comes to manipulating magic.

Either due to some abnormally good intuition or being exceptionally perceptive, Nina's been able to improve her magic noticeably quickly just by being given clues to start with. She's even better than me, someone with knowledge of Japanese, so I don't think it can be explained as simply as it being because she knows Elvish.

“Nina-san, is good, magic...”

“Yeah, she really is.”

I nodded, then spoke from the bottom of my heart.

“I'm glad that you became my pupil, Ai.”

“Eh—”

Seeing Ai's astonishment as she looked up at me, I smiled towards her.

“Nina advances too quickly. Furthermore, as she herself isn’t able to explain how she does it, it wouldn’t make for good research at all. So really, Ai, I’m happy that you’re here.”

It was the same kind of thing in my former world, but geniuses can’t understand the feelings of those who can’t do things. Although Nina is an excellent partner, she isn’t suitable as a pupil in the least.

In that respect, I can say that Ai is the best at being a pupil.

She’s earnest, hard working, patient, and diligent.

Personally, I believe that her disposition of advancing step-by-step, properly understanding things as she goes, is much harder to come across than even Nina’s talent.

“I’m unreliable as a mentor, but I hope that we can continue as we always have, Ai.”

“Yeah!”

A smile lighting up her face, Ai nodded.

“Ah, just now, I didn’t mean, Mentor is unreliable...!”

“I know, I know. It’s alright.”

It took a bit of work, but I later managed to pacify her from continuing to take back what she said in a panic.

“I think it’s about time.”

Hearing me say something with us all sitting around the dining table, Ai and Nina tilted their heads to the side.

“I think that I’ll give going to the village Ai lived in another try.”

With a clanking sound, the wooden spoon Ai had been holding fell to the ground.

“No!”

“Eh—?”

“Why don’t you want me to?”

“I, don’t want leave, here!”

She clung to my leg tightly.

“Even if you say that, I—”

“As always! You said...!”

Ai shouted, cutting me off.

This was the first time she’s ever raised her voice, so I wound up being overawed by a tiny girl not even half my size.

“Continue, as always! Even though, you said!”

Hmm?

“I stay with Mentor, forever—”

“Please, wait a moment. Aren’t you misunderstanding me?”

I touched Ai’s shoulder and looked into her eyes.

“I will not leave you.”

“Eh?”

Her eyes dripping tears, Ai blinked.

“Magic research isn’t something we can do with us three alone, and my goal has always been to enrich people’s lives with it. For that, we need to share the results we’ve found so that the next generation can inherit them.”

“*Generation...*?”

Oh, is that another word I haven’t taught her yet?

“I’m saying that it has to be taught to children, as well as those children’s children and so on.”

Finally realizing her misunderstanding when I said that, Ai blushed in embarrassment.

“So for that, I have to get in contact with Ai’s family and the other villagers.”

“Y-... yeah!”

Seeing Ai understand and nod her head, I felt relieved.

“Nina, you’ll also... is something wrong?”

When I looked next to me, Nina was holding her hand against her forehead and gazing up at the sky.

Chapter 9: Gifts

*People generally dislike clichéd things.
Are they tired of seeing things
be repeated each time?*

“... It’s ready!”

Still using my tail to stir the spring water I’d brought to a steady steam by breathing fire onto it, I raised my voice.

“You took long enough!”

“Excuse, me.”

Then, from behind my back, I heard the sound of water being splashed into. Following that was the sound of someone gingerly dipping into the spring. The sounds had come from Nina and Ai respectively entering the spring. Only at times like these did I find having the sharp hearing of a dragon disagreeable.

“Aah, this feels great... the temperature is just right.”

“So good...”

Contrasting the girls’ relaxation, I couldn’t settle down at all. The reason being that the two girls behind me had entered the spring as naked as can be.

“Hey. Why do you always look away? Turn around.”

“No, that’d be a bit...”

“Don’t want, to see my face...?”

“No, it’s not like that. Just...”

Ai usually takes my side on things, but it turns into a trial for me whenever we do something like this.

“Tell me why you don’t want to look over here!”

Nina suddenly caught a hold of my lengthy neck with her arms and yanked on it.

But I don’t think that I could explain it that well at all.

I mean, these girls don’t even have the notion of being ashamed by nudity.

Perhaps that notion isn’t something that humans have inherently, but is rather enculturated? Like something that is learned by paying attention to parents being embarrassed by nudity.

“Well, it’s because... you two aren’t wearing any clothes right now?”

“Aren’t you the one that told us to take them off?”

“I did, but...”

“Is it... because I don’t, have scales...?”

“No no no, that’s not the problem at all.”

Hearing her sound like she was about to fall into despair, I shook my head.

“I’m a man, and you two are women. A man seeing a naked woman is, well... not too good of a thing.”

“What? Isn’t a woman seeing a naked man fine though?”

“That’s also not too good of a thing, I think...”

“But aren’t you always naked?”

” !! ”

A sudden shock.

Now that I think about it, it is true. I hadn’t minded it much since I’m a dragon, but I definitely haven’t been wearing any clothing.

Which means that I've been nude this whole time.

"No, no, no, it's different! Wait, please. Look, I... I'm a dragon. So I don't need clothes."

"So then doesn't being a man or a woman have nothing to do with anything?"

Nina came right back at me with a sound argument.

She's right. Me being naked because I'm a dragon makes the logic of men not exposing their bodies to women seem like a fallacy. It's what's called a double standard.

"... Alright. I admit defeat."

I turned around... reluctantly. The spring water was crystal clear, so it didn't conceal the two girls' bodies in the least. Moreover, since they weren't exactly trying to hide themselves, I had a full view of them from top to bottom.

"Umm, Mentor... are you okay? Am I, gross?"

"No, that's not it at all."

I shook my head in response to Ai's uneasy question.

"But, then... why aren't you, looking at me?"

Because your body developed way more than I thought!

I didn't say that out loud, though.

Both of them were in their early teens. They were still children. I'd been embarrassed, but I don't think I've ever looked at them with indecent thoughts.

"... Right, it's already been a year, hasn't it?"

"A *year*?"

"Yeah. It's around the same temperature as it was when you came to me, isn't it, Ai?"

This world's year is four hundred days long, a bit longer than Earth's. It's been three hundred and eighty-four days since the day I met Ai if I recall correctly, so it's been just about a year. Her appearance has undergone a great deal of change in this past year.

"Come to think of it, Ai, you got bigger than me at some point, didn't you?"

Yeah.

Neither mine nor Nina's physiques had changed much at all. Ai was the only one who'd grown.

She'd probably lacked nourishment. She was only about tall enough for me to see her as a ten year old, but now she's steadily surpassed Nina. Even her skin-and-bones look has started to fill out to look more womanly. Now she's looking closer to fifteen or sixteen... and her chest, how should I put it... well, it's making its presence known.

It's to the point that looking straight at her is a bit difficult.

"Mentor doesn't want to see me, because I got bigger?"

Seeing Ai look down in worry as she said that almost made me spit out fire.

That's a very dangerous topic.

"No! It's just, umm..."

I suddenly regretted having almost no experience with women in my previous life. I'm never able to think of what I should say at times like this.

"It's just that Ai has become so beautiful that simply seeing you makes me embarrassed."

When I said the only thing that came to my mind, Ai went silent and blushed.

"Hey."

Feeling my tail be pulled on, I turned around to face Nina.

“What about me?”

In that regard, Nina was relatively easy to look at. She definitely is a refreshing beauty, but not in a lavish, fleshy way. She’s like a work of art. Or maybe I’ve simply just gotten used to seeing her since she prefers to sleep in the nude?

Honestly, her chest had indeed swelled a little, but it lacked that strong, gaze-inducing power like Ai’s. Although it’s impossible for me to stare as a gentleman, for someone as unsociable as me, it definitely holds a sense of appeal to it.

“Nina, I like you the way you are.”

“... I don’t get why, but it feels like you’re making fun of me!”

Thankfully, the mood didn’t turn go in a weird direction because of Nina making a fuss.

“Well then, Ai. Are you ready?”

“... Yes.”

Her voice sounded stiff when she replied from the top of my head. She was probably feeling nervous.

“It’s alright.”

I spread out my wings, shielding her body.

“I’ll protect you if anything happens.”

“Y-yeah...”

Her response sounded even more strained this time. Did I make her feel more nervous?

Well, it’s not like I can’t understand why. This is the first time she’ll be going there in a year. Moreover, for her, now that she’d gotten completely used to speaking, her family are people she can’t

communicate with at all. To be honest, even I'm a bit afraid.

However, I had a plan.

My birthplace is Japan, a land proud of its culture.

A gift for each season, a gift for each festival, and a gift for the year's end.

Summer, winter... even spring and autumn. I'd been giving Ai's family things like deer meat, fruits, and nuts as gifts. They haven't even been too afraid of me recently and, while it may be my own self-conceit, I believe that I've been able to build up good relations with them.

And then there's Ai.

She'd cleaned herself to a sparkle in the bath, had her hair combed and tied up by Nina, and had also decorated her form-fitting outfit with leaves and flowers. She had been brought to me in a similar way as a sacrifice, but she's since blossomed into true beauty with her current nutrition.

With her previously unkempt hair glossy smooth and her previously skinny body rounded into a more womanly figure, she'd now smiled countless times.

Just by seeing her, there should be no mistaking that I have cherished her even if they can't understand my words. Even though it caused me some embarrassment, just having her take that bath has showed its results.

Moreover, rather than fly through the sky, I slowly walked to their cave in an attempt to not seem as intimidating. My intention of being friendly with them should be understood now that I've done this much.

"Come to think of it... they do have some words, don't they?"

"Yes. More like signals, than words, though."

"Then, could you translate—I mean... if they say something,

whatever it is, could you tell me what it means?”

“Okay, leave it to me!”

I heard the sound of her thumping her chest from behind my head together with her response.

Well, rather than a thump... maybe it'd be better described as a boing?

I'll stop there. Let's forget about yesterday.

Around that moment, I saw three men coming out of the cave.

[Back!]

Ai spoke before they'd even reacted.

“Ah, just now, that was like ‘I'm home’.”

“I see.”

It's a bit late, but I just realized that it would have been better to learn these signals in advance if they were going to be this simple.

I was even able to learn Elvish in such a short amount of time, so I don't think it would've been too hard.

Which means that my so-called perfect preparations weren't perfect at all.

The men placed the spears they were holding on the ground and knelt.

The situation looked safe, so I lowered my head and let Ai off.

One of the men saw Ai and gasped in wonder.

“Mentor, that is my dad.”

Ai turned around, saying as much with a tinge of shyness.

Now that I think about it, it does feel like he was among the the

ones who brought her to me.

“Well, hello. It’s not much, but...”

Lowering my head in a bow, I placed the wild boar that I was carrying in front of him. Seeing that, he and the two other men cheered in joy. I call it a boar, but it’s a pretty big one at about the same height as Ai.

A few more people started popping up from inside the cave after hearing the men’s cheering.

And so the feast began.

I lit up some firewood, roasted the wild boar, and divided it up with my claws.

Even the children which I hadn’t seen before now came out and ate the meat.

Everyone surrounded the fire, the men stamping their feet and dancing as the women sang.

I also roared along with the lyric-less tune.

There were still a few people that glanced over at me in fear, but it wasn’t something that could be rushed. At the very least, they hadn’t thrown any spears at me, so it feels like I was able to bring a few people around.

I should be able to get into closer contact with them and teach them language now.

It was at that moment, as I was feeling relieved.

A reverent look to them, some brought a young girl to me.

I was assaulted by a sudden wave of déjà vu, but Ai was sitting next to me. It was a different girl.

Although they weren’t holding spears this time, this was exactly the same as the previous time they presented a decorated girl to me.

[Offer.]

The men knelt and uttered the same word as that time.

“Ai, what are they...”

[No!]

Ai shouted something before I could finish asking her.

[I, Wife!]

She pulled on my foreleg and shouted two short sounds.

[Unneeded!]

She then pointed at the girl who'd been brought out and shouted.

The men retreated with a surprised look to them, their heads hung low.

“Hey, Ai, what did you just say?”

“Nothing at all.”

Ai spoke with a smile. However, for some reason, her smile felt just a bit scary.

“No, you definitely just—”

“Nothing. At. All.”

Still smiling, Ai repeated herself.

No matter how many times I asked, Ai never told me what she said that day.

Chapter 10: Magic Incantations



*An excellent caster of magic is, namely,
an excellent singer of song.*

“... Here’s one...!”

While very, very discreetly making my way through the forest’s foliage, I finally found my prey. A deer.

I call it a deer, but it’s not exactly the one I know of. It has a strikingly geometric pattern down its whole body, a heroic-looking horn, and is a being that could easily push down a tree by pushing against it.

Be it me or that Armored Bear, doesn’t this world’s wildlife have too much in the way of combat effectiveness?

“Ai. Can I leave it to you?”

“Yeah...!”

When I whispered to Ai on my back and felt her nod, the trees in front of the deer rustled. Noticing that it was clearly different that being rustled by the wind with its senses, it jumped backward on

reflex.

—In other words, it was heading right toward us.

Using that chance, I jumped out from the bushes and swung my claws. However, just before I made contact, the deer quickly changed its course and dodged my swipe.

“Missed!”

Spreading my wings, I assaulted it with a gust of air by flapping them. Although the deer did lose its balance for a moment due to that, it vanished into the forest before I could give chase.

“Another failure, is it...?”

“I’m sorry, Mentor...”

“Oh, no, it’s not your fault. It’s my clumsiness.”

I’m not too good at hunting to begin with.

To the point that I would’ve been doing good by being successful one out of ten times.

I’ve gotten to the point of succeeding once every seven times thanks in no small part to Ai’s help, so it’s definitely not her fault.

Although it isn’t...

“What should I do...”

Our current way of life has stumped me.

There are a total of sixteen people in Ai’s settlement. Adding me, Nina, and Ai to that, it brings to total to eighteen people and one pretty big animal.

Even if it was possible for me to cover us three with my current success rate at hunting, it’s difficult to maintain it for that many people.

They were able to live in this world up until now, of course. It’s

just that although they could live on their own, they did so with a major lack in nutrition.

And that they had no time to do anything else in their life.

They would set out to hunt in the morning when the sun rose and sleep when it went down. That was almost their entire life. Even so, it was a question as to whether or not they would have enough food to eat. Many of them had died of starvation, half of those sixteen were children.

I was feeling quite acutely that having the time for education was itself a luxury that they didn't have.

"Oh well, let's call it a day and head back."

"... Alright."

Seeing that the sun was in the middle of the sky, I spoke to Ai.

Today's harvest was nuts, fish, and shellfish. Things like these are fairly stable in harvesting compared to large prey, but the fact that it's easy to over harvest them makes it difficult, so I only take what's needed for the day.

"I'm back."

"Welcome back."

"*Welcome back~!*"

"*Welcome back!*"

When we returned to the cave, Nina and the children greeted us. Hearing the downpour of lively greetings, I smiled.

The children's learning capabilities truly surprised me. Even though it hadn't been too long since we moved our base closer to the cave, they'd already begun memorizing the more simple phrases.

"You weren't able to catch any large prey today either then, I

take it?”

“Yeah... sorry.”

“It’s not like I particularly mind...”

Taking the hunt’s spoils from me, Nina quickly put them into jars.

“Really, wouldn’t it be better for me to go with you?”

Hearing Nina’s question, I groaned.

It’s true, the efficiency of my hunting would improve dramatically if she came along.

Elves are basically the children of the forest.

They can sense living things much more keenly than any wild creature and could even out-creep an insect, not to mention how they could trap their prey by using all of the surrounding trees. If I go with her, even my lackluster hunting skills would get a boost up to producing a success once every other try.

“Well, I’ll try it out with Ai a bit longer. I’d like you to handle this place a bit longer.”

Yet even so, I have a reason as to why I don’t want to take Nina.

“Please protect the children.”

“I don’t have much of a choice, do I?”

Nina agreed. Her cheeks were puffed out in displeasure, though.

She and I were the only two that could do something if this settlement was attacked by some invader.

It would leave me uneasy if we both left it at the same time.

Although it was fine when I just had to take Ai hunting as well, it’s a whole other story now that there are eight other children to think about. Not to mention the fact that two of them are still just babies.

“Well, Ai is steadily improving with her magic, so it should change for the better soon enough.”

As long as we can all stay alive, things will get better and improve.

That’s what I believe, at least. For that sake, I absolutely cannot allow these children to die simply because they might end up easily dying even in the best of times.

“How about we start today’s lesson?”

When I said that, all of the children raised their hands and screamed in delight.

It may be because I give them berries after each lesson, but they are generally all truly enthusiastic about learning. The fact that Ai, a girl who learned magic from me, is here as well might also have a big part to do with it. Some have been zealously learning new words from Nina even while I’m not here, there’s even a child that’s succeeded in using simple magic.

“Mentor! *Fire, appear!*”

The one advancing the quickest amongst them is a young boy named Ken.

“Oooh, good job! You’re amazing, Ken.”

I’d say that he looks a little younger than Ai.

While not quite to the point of feeling like his ability to understand was at genius levels like Ai’s, he was still plenty fast. He was absorbing everything I taught him as fast as I could show him. The concept of [Energy] seems to be particularly difficult for them to understand, the children other than Ken would be doing well if they could move a leaf just a bit.

While the children were learning enthusiastically, the problem was the adults.

Although it was due to them being busy because of needing to

hunt, they hadn't tried to learn any words at all, much less magic.

To be honest, magic isn't too useful right now. Although it's different for people who can handle it as skillfully as Nina, even Ai's level of magic can't be used for much. If it's something like rustling trees, a couple of men or one of my arms would be enough to do the job. Her fire magic can't ignite firewood, either. The only ones who can produce flames that are able to ignite other things are still just Nina and I.

And although it's not as though they are attempting to interfere with me teaching the children, I would at least like them to try learning how to speak.

I had Ai teach me the form of language they used, but it wasn't of much use.

How to move when out hunting, what to do in everyday life, and how to do specific things... if they hadn't accumulated that sort of knowledge, there wasn't much meaning in me teaching them a language anyway.

They all lived together and shared the majority of their lives, which is why having those simple signals were enough for them. They hadn't had a reason to use words to explain things to other people in the first place.

Well, it's not like I'd understand the subtle details in such a short amount of time. Even me learning what they know might not have much of a point. My physique is simply too different from theirs. If I, someone who isn't human, lived life the same way as them, I might not experience the same things.

Which is why although I'd like them to learn a language, something that would allow them to converse with those that held a different set of values, I'm not able to convey just how useful being able to use one is to them exactly because they do not already know a language.

"Fire! Appear! Fire! Appear!"

As I was lost in thought, Ken was happily putting out and reigniting the flame. Come to think of it, I also kept having fun with the fire coming out of my mouth just after I reincarnated in this world, didn't I?

Children were things that loved to play with fire.

"Ken, even if it isn't hot, you shouldn't..."

You shouldn't play with it too much.

As I was about to chide him, I got a surprise.

The flame he'd created was considerably hotter than usual.

If the flames Ai could produce were like warm water, his was definitely closer to hot water.

"Ken!? How did you do that!?"

I unintentionally shouted that out, causing Ken to be frightened as he put the fire out.

"I'm sorry, I'm not angry. It's alright. Could you please try *appearing the fire* again?"

Nodding, Ken timidly caused the flames to appear again. What appeared above his palm wasn't any different from what Ai could create... no, it was actually at a somewhat lower temperature.

"Huh? Could you make the same fire as a moment ago?"

When I asked Ken that, he looked troubled.

"Why...? Is it like he ran out of MP or something...?"

Although I wasn't particularly worried about it thus far, I hadn't been thinking that magic was something that could be used indefinitely without some sort of cost to it. It probably used willpower, mana, or something similar to fuel it.

"Isn't it because he's not saying 'fire, appear' now?"

As I was wracking my brains, Nina spoke up with a quip while she continued scraping off a fish's scales with her stone knife.

"No, there's no way something... so... simple?"

Half doubting myself, I urged Ken to try doing it while speaking.

"Fire... fire, appear!"

A flame arose from Ken's palm as he shouted out with gusto.

It wasn't just an illusion formed by heat and light. It was a true flame.

"I see... so that's it?"

Why didn't I notice something so simple?

"Magic incantations."

It looks like we've been ignoring the incantation part this whole time.

Chapter 11: Grimoire

*May it be that a voice shall fade,
books will forever light the way.*

“Oh branch, move!”

As though obeying me, the water apple tree’s branch shook slightly.

“Oh flames, soar upward!”

However, the words I followed up with vanished into the air without the branch so much as rustling.

“Hmm... Oh water apple tree branch, stretch and send one of your leaves to me.”

Following what I said, a branch extended out toward me and dropped a leaf at my feet.

I looked at the leaf and began to chant vigorously.

“... Oh tree of forbidden wisdom, Darkness Water Apple, rise from purgatory and bestow upon this being your fruit—”

“What’re you saying?”

“Uwaaah!?”

Hearing a voice suddenly come from behind me, I literally jumped up into the air.

“N-Nina. You’re early.”

“The trees were rustling so I thought something was up. What was that a second ago?”

Even though I chose to do this before the sun even came up so that no one would see...!

No, let's settle down. She doesn't know about the concept of [Chuuni].

There shouldn't be a problem in me telling her.

"It somehow felt like you were saying something super weird?"

This girl definitely has a sixth sense!!

This is the first time I've resented her characteristic ability to sense things.

"You thinking it's strange can't be helped. I was testing out a ground-breaking way of using magic just now. It may even increase the power magic has a few levels. However, I have to try out various things in order to find the most effective way, so I'm making sure to test things that sound awkward as well."

"Let me hear what you said a moment ago."

"... Please spare me..."

I graciously accepted my defeat.

"Still though, it really is easier to use magic while speaking."

"You knew?"

"Sort of. I thought it was just like that for me though."

Nina held out her arm and asked the tree to give her one of its fruits. When she did that, the water apple tree placed a water apple into her hand with movements as dexterous as a person's hand.

What amazing precision.

"Apparently, the longer the incantation, the better the effect."

"Is that so?"

While not exactly knowing why, I nodded all the same.

"Also, anything said that is irrelevant to the magic itself it

meaningless, no matter which way you try arranging it.”

“Isn’t that obvious?”

She sounded a bit cocky.

“Well, it might be something obvious for you, but we have to examine each and every possibility thoroughly.”

“Hmm.”

She nibbled on the water apple as she halfheartedly listened to my explanation.

“Hey, you said that the longer, the better right?”

“I don’t know the reason why, but yeah.”

Nina tossed the water apple’s core away and closed her eyes.

[Oh trees, those which spreads their roots through the ground, those which flourish with so many leaves, those which bloom with flowers, those which produce fruit.]

This was something I hadn’t heard in a while. She was speaking in Elvish.

[Listen to wind’s whispers as it passes through the groves, to the leaves’ mutters as they fall and flutter to the ground, to the sound of your roots absorbing water, and to my voice.]

She spoke her words like composing a poem, like weaving a tapestry.

[Use your supple arms to seize and deliver unto me my nourishment, the quadruped beast, the white thing that bounds to and fro.]

It happened just as the verse finished.

—All of the trees, they... roared.

It wasn’t something so simple as it being noisy. The trees

themselves trembled as they undulated, squirmed, and bellowed.

The earth shook as birds took to the sky in attempts to escape the trees. The roar of various beasts resounded from places off in the distance.

“Mentor, are you alright!?”

Surprised by the sound, Ai leapt out of bed and came running to me in whatever she was already wearing.

The men peeped outside of the cave, spears in hand.

And then—

Plop.

With a starkly quiet sound compared to the uproar from just before, a single rabbit was thrown to Nina’s feet.

Both me, Ai, the people in the cave, as well as the rabbit itself, couldn’t understand what just happened, our eyes opened wide. The first one to make a move without that stunned silence was the one to cause the commotion... Nina.

“I caught it!”

Quickly reaching out toward it, she caught the rabbit by its long ears. It tried to escape, but it was already too late.

“That surprised me... I didn’t think anything like that would happen.”

Keeping the struggling rabbit away from her body, Nina patted her chest in relief.

“That really surprised me, too.”

“Was that, Nina-san’s magic?”

Still holding my foreleg, Ai’s eyes darted back and forth between Nina, the rabbit, and the trees in bewilderment.

“To think that the incantation holds that much influence on the result...”

Let’s never make use of an incantation for fire magic.

“Can I do it, too?”

“It might be a bit early for you, Ai...”

With a huge vocabulary to construct an incantation, one must also have a suitable skill in sentence construction.

Not even Nina was able to construct her incantation in Japanese.

Ai had also gotten to the point of knowing quite a lot of words, but it was probably still too hard for her.

“Is that, so...?”

I wanted to do something when I saw her hang her head in despondence, but this is one of the few problems that’ll just needs times to overcome...

Just as I finished thinking that, a certain thought flashed through my head.

“No, that’s not it.”

I’m not sure if it’ll go well, but it’s worth a shot.

If it does work, various problems might all be resolved in one go.

“Alright, let’s try something. Are you willing to cooperate with me?”

“Yes!”

The finally rising morning sun shined down on Ai’s delighted smile.

“You who is clad in white clothing, the comrade of all ice, the snow spirit, oh Jack Frost. Send to me your breath. Fill this with your frost.”

Holding an unfired jar, Ai looked at the wooden plank I was holding as she recited the incantation. Something that looked like a white fog spread within the jar. My eyes perceived that it was definitely water in the air going below the freezing point.

She quickly used a large leaf to cover the jar's opening, put a plank above that, then sealed it with a stone.

It was a simplistic freezer, like what used to be built in primitive times.

It wouldn't last as long as the real thing, but it should still allow a gutted fish to last two or three days. Living should get a lot easier if we can preserve and store easily-acquired fish and shellfish for later.

"I did it!"

"Yeah. Thank you, Ai. You did well!"

Seeing Ai unusually act so proudly, I gently patted her head with my fingertip.

"It's all thanks to Mentor, that I could make this."

Showing signs of embarrassment, she pointed at the board I had modestly.

On it was the incantation she recited a moment ago.

It was the oldest grimoire in the world, so to speak.

It was written on a wooden plank with charcoal entirely in hiragana, though.

There wasn't any need for her to think about what to say for the incantation herself. A third party may think that, but there were three factors as work.

What were those three factors? Meaning, intention, and design.

Firstly, you had to understand the meaning of the incantation's

words.

I tried having Nina test it out by telling her to do it phonetically in English, but, as expected, if the person themselves didn't understand the meaning of the words they spoke, they wouldn't work as an incantation.

Secondly, the intention. Even if both the meaning and design requirements are met, the effect wouldn't come to fruition if the magic is used without there being an intention behind it. Just speaking an incantation without thinking anything wouldn't invoke the magic.

And lastly, the most important, is the design.

The design is why the words spoken were used in the incantation... in other words, there has to be a relationship throughout it all. Nina said that it was natural, but it wasn't something as simple as that.

Just repeated the same words wouldn't work.

[Oh trees, those which spreads their roots through the ground, those which flourish with so many leaves, those which bloom with flowers, those which produce fruit.]

Like how Nina had recited, even though she said things that all meant tree in the end, she designed it such that each individual statement was a different way of saying the same thing. And in proportion with the level of design given, the magic's effectiveness would increase.

To put it another way, having only ever used magic without the incantation, we had only ever used magic through meaning and intention.

"Mentor, can I ask you, something?"

"What?"

"Mentor, have you ever seen, Jack Frost?"

I was at a loss on how to answer Ai's question.

Jack Frost. A spirit of ice and snow that appears within England's myths.

I didn't know whether or not spirits actually existed within this world. But since it's easier to refer to a concept like him after personifying it, I simply decided to do so and include it in the incantation.

"Yeah, I have."

The incantation might just lose its effect if she realized that he doesn't exist.

Thinking that, I lied to her.

It's be troubling if we lost the help of that cold incantation now.

Besides, it wasn't necessarily a lie either. I have met him.

... It was inside a game, though.

"I want to meet him, too."

"Yeah. If you work hard in studying magic, you might just be able to meet him some day."

I never thought that my white lie would lead to something outrageous in the distant future.

Chapter 12: A Concern

Bad premonitions are often right on the mark.

“Fireball, salamander, stick out your tongue. Use your tongue to make fire!”

When I heard Ken chanting inside the village, I saw a bundle of kindling begin to burn.

“That one’s gotten fairly popular...”

What Ken just recited just now was something that could be heard in various places around the village nowadays.

Still, I’ve realized that it’s easier for them to memorize incantations that use simple sentences, so after making a few, even those that aren’t able to read words yet are able to memorize several incantations.

As a result, most of the villagers have gotten to the point of being able to use magic that can produce true flames.

Ai and Ken have been learning magic that’s reached the level of being actually useful and would follow up by displaying their practical uses to the adults.

And the simple freezer has improved enough so that we can now store fish inside of it for three days and it still be safe to eat after cooking. To put it another way, we now only have to go fishing once every three days.

Moreover, even the children are able to manipulate plants and trees well enough to pick the fruits and berries that are usually too far out of reach. There’s even been some instances of them catching small birds and animals.

Our general food situation has improved greatly, so there are even some adults coming with the children to learn magic.

Language too, of course.

Everything has been going smoothly.

—Except for just one concern.

“Mentor.”

It happened at the time I was worried about how to handle it.

The one who called out to me was the eldest man in the village.

Ai’s father, Guy-san... My nonexistent naming sense is awful.

“Hunt, go. Come?”

“... Alright. I’ll go with you.”

Well, it’s not something that’ll be resolved just by me sitting here thinking about it.

Thinking that a change of pace might help, I decided to follow Guy-san and the others on their hunting trip.

“Mentor! I’ll go too!”

Just as we were about to leave the cave, Ai came shooting out towards us.

“No.”

However, Guy-san thrust his arm out suddenly, stopping her.

“Hunting, man, do. Woman, wait.”

“But...”

With Guy-san sounding as though there was no room for a rebuttal, Ai looked toward me.

Their society was patriarchal, with fathers holding absolute authority. I’ve been overlooked as far as that rule is concerned due to being an irregularity, but as a human woman, Ai wasn’t allowed

to go out hunting.

Or maybe I should say that even her wishing to defy her father's intentions itself wasn't allowed?

She wasn't even able to complain about being offered as a sacrifice.

I've come to believe that they practically treat women as objects; however, they do decide things with at least some rationality. At the very least, I don't think it's a good idea for me to butt into the matter simply out of my own ego.

"It's alright. We'll capture something big, so be a good child and wait here, okay?"

"... Okay."

Hearing what I had to say, Ai hung her head and reluctantly nodded.

"Be careful!"

"Try not to goof up too badly!"

With Ai's and Nina's voices sending me off, we headed out to hunt.

Their customs and the thing I'm concerned about are, honestly, in agreement with each other.

Not about women's position in their society, I mean.

It's that there simply aren't enough people.

Not including me and Nina, this village has seventeen people in it.

Of them, eight are children. Of the adults, five are men and four are women.

Given that there are eight children and nine adults, that means

that their population is currently in a downward trend. That isn't to mention how there isn't even the concept of medicine or medical treatment in this world. There's no guarantee that those eight children will live until adulthood.

As those that give birth to the next generation and maintain their population, women are incredibly important. Therefore, they aren't allowed to do something as dangerous as hunting. At the very least, the old-fashioned custom of having women protect the dwelling is reasonable, given the circumstances. I am in one of those pre-modern eras, after all.

Even so. No matter how I think about it, as a dragon, I am unable to have children with them. It would be impossible for them to give birth to something as large as a dragon in the first place.

The only things I could do were: defend them, hunt prey, and develop magic as much as possible while I am still alive.

“... Huh?”

As my train of thought was travelling down that fruitless path, I noticed just how far we had walked away from the cave.

“Could it be that we're going to leave the forest?”

When I asked Guy-san that, he nodded in response.

Both they and I generally only hunted within the forest.

It's partly due to me building my base close to the cave, but it's also partly due to the things we could hunt in the plains being particularly more difficult.

First was the fact that the trees Nina could manipulate into helping us were much fewer than what she could in the forest.

She's able to manipulate grass as well nowadays, but it's almost impossible to catch the giant beasts that live in the plains with grass.

I thought that I might be able to catch them easily if I swoop

down on them from the sky, but that ended in vain, too. The moment they saw my figure in the sky, they would run away into cover and make it very, very hard to find them. Unfortunately, moving faster makes it so that I lose my ability to make tight turns. Making the tight turns needed to catch prey that's trying to escape as I'm in the middle of a dive is incredibly difficult.

Guy-san and them were having similar troubles with hunting in the plains, so they had generally only been hunting in the forest.

Passing by the old base Nina and I made (it's been several months since we left it, but it's already in ruins), we left the forest.

Come to think of it, I just realized that this is the first time I've left the forest on foot.

Surprisingly, it didn't take too long despite having to weave through and over the forest's underbrush.

It's not to the point of Nina's being able to do it without even a single strand of hair getting caught on something, but seeing Guy-san and them walk just as fast through the forest as when they walk on flat ground, it looks like they're right at home.

Rather, we're walking at a fast enough pace that I might be what's holding them back.

Once we reached the plains, Guy-san and the others set out unhesitatingly.

I can't really tell if they have some destination in mind or if they're just walking. Either way, I trusted their sense of direction and followed along.

[See.]

Just then, Guy-san suddenly raised his voice and held up his spear.

That's supposed to be the signal for when they've found prey, but I can't tell where it is at all.

When I started looking about the vicinity, they set out once more. They weren't crawling and hiding, nor were they running away in a hurry. They were just walking normally.

Did he make a mistake?

Following them as I tilted my head in befuddlement, I suddenly noticed it.

Guy-san definitely had seen something. But it wasn't the prey itself.

What he found was its footprints.

I'm only saw grass growing on the ground, but Guy-san bent down to check the ground repeatedly.

[See.]

We had continued on in this manner for somewhere around two hours. Guy-san said it again, but this time, he'd seen the prey itself.

"Mentor, *there*."

And so he spoke to me, politely using the Japanese I had taught him.

"Yeah... I see it. Alright."

More like, there's no way that I wouldn't see it.

"Do you really intend to hunt *that*?"

When I asked to make sure, they all nodded together.

"I mean, *that*? Really?"

Listening to the thuds resound from its steps, I looked up toward it.

The biggest thing I'd seen since mother was moving slowly.

"It's as big as a multi-floored building though?"

Those who could understand what I just compared this gargantuan to did not yet exist in this world.

Chapter 13: Herculean Strength

*Grasp it, picture it, then release it.
That's magic.*

The first thing that came to my mind as I attempted to compare that creature to something was an elephant.

It had four thick legs, a huge body, and long tusks growing from its mouth.

But that's as far as it went for looking like an elephant. Supported by a long neck, its large head looked more like a rhino's or a hippo's. It had horns growing from its temples like a cow, too. Its very, very long crocodilian tail completed the look.

Still though, what stands out the most is by far its size.

Even on all fours, it's so tall that I have to look upward to see its head.

Let alone Guy-san, its size is definitely sufficient for trampling me into the ground.

"Spear, throw. Mentor, fly. Bite."

"Ah, so I'll be the one that has to stop it after all..."

Guy-san's explanation was concise.

Guy-san and the others would surround it in a semicircle and throw their spears at it while I met it head on.

We'd hunted a number of beasts with this strategy before this.

But the largest thing we had successfully hunted that way was a wild boar, something not even a tenth the size of this giant.

“Mentor, *strong. Win.*”

I appreciate him putting so much faith into me, but isn't he overestimating me a little too much?

“Well, let's give it a shot... hold out your spears.”

Holding my palm out before the five spears held out toward me, I recited an incantation.

“Oh those that are long, sharp, and may pierce anything. Bend thy ears and heed mine call, bask in the light of mine flames and shine out in glory. Become spears without equal, thine aim never faltering, thy strikes unblockable. Act as shooting stars, capable of piercing even the most colossal of beasts.”

Then, once I carefully breathed fire out onto the spears, the stone spearheads began to glow red.

This happened due to an incantation I'd devised.

The effectiveness of magic usually isn't immediately recognizable to the eyes. Accordingly, it's also just as often hard to tell how long the magic's effect lasts.

Which is why I decided to add the glow as one of its effects.

... Things having some sort of glow after having magic used on them is basically a sure thing when it comes to fiction, but it honestly does have a practical reason behind it, too.

“Make sure you're ready to go before the glow fades.”

Unfurling my wings, I flew off in a slightly different direction and took a detour so that that giant wouldn't see me.

Come to think of it, I should give this kind of beast a name.

I say that, but there's only one name that comes to mind.

Behemoth.

Behemoth, a monster from the Old Testament.

I sincerely hope that there's no creature bigger than this thing.

Once I had flown high up into the sky, Guy-san and the others surrounded the behemoth in a semicircle and threw their spears at it. The glowing spearheads tore through the air just like how I'd imagined them doing and pierced into the behemoth's body.

"It really is tough, isn't it."

I muttered that as I saw the spears only stab half their length into it.

The magic I'd imagined was one that would have spears piercing the behemoth all the way through, shooting out its other side.

The fact that that was all that happened despite me reciting such a long and thought-out incantation just went to show how solid and firm the behemoth's hide was.

I'm not even sure if my fangs can pierce it, honestly.

Fortunately, the behemoth didn't turn toward Guy-san and the others. Instead, it actually started to run away from them.

The behemoth would have been able to crush Guy-san and them if it felt like it, so I felt relieved that everything was going well.

Given its scale, it would be like it getting pierced by toothpicks. Even so, it looks like this is the first time it's felt even that much pain.

Following the behemoth's retreat, I began to descend towards it in a steep dive.

Even with me being such a poor hunter, there's no chance at me missing such a huge target running straight away from me. Imagining myself biting through its windpipe, I snapped at its neck with my fangs.

"Gyuuu..."

A strange sound came from the behemoth as a mixture of blood and air streamed out of its neck.

So hard!

The behemoth's neck was tremendously tough, like biting into an iron pillar. Its skin was hard enough that I wondered how those spears had even pierced it.

I used all the strength I could muster to squeeze down with my jaws, pushing my semi-pierced fangs further into it. It felt horrible, like I was biting into a roll of aluminum foil. Not breaking despite going up against this ridiculously hard skin shows that my fangs are considerably tough, but the skin's firmness was even more tough.

By the time I'd managed to bite into that small portion of the behemoth's neck, it started swinging its massive head in an attempt to resist. I couldn't let myself be thrown off, so I dug my claws into it and managed to hold on through its efforts.

I then heard a horrible slicing sound, which was followed by its neck going limp. In that moment, I tore off the piece of flesh I was working on.

My timing was terrible.

Losing the support from my mouth, I lost grip with my claws as well and fell from the behemoth, its flesh still in my mouth.

When I tried unfolding my wings to catch the wind, a huge shadow passed over me.

"Oooooooooo!"

A thunderous reverberation accompanied the beast's deep roar.

I stared at a spectacle that I never thought I would see.

That thick, hard neck that not even I could bite through... was sliced off in a single blow.

Having lost its head, the behemoth's body tumbled to the side

and crashed into the ground, one final roar coming from it. Flapping my wings several times, I descended to the ground while staring at *it*.

... Big.

It was definitely small compared to the behemoth, but even so, it was still around the same height as me.

Its arms and legs were as thick as logs and its muscles were like chiseled marble.

It had peculiarly red hair and a lion-like mane.

In terms of physique, it was smaller than the armored bear, let alone the behemoth.

However.

However, this creature that looked like a gorilla, lion, and bear were mixed together—

[Tch, I missed the lizard?]

—seemed to be a human.

[Elvish... you can speak Elvish?]

[Oh, so the lizard can speak?]

It looks like we both managed to surprise each other.

I can't tell how old he is, but judging by his voice, he seems unexpectedly young. In his twenties at most.

[I don't know what that *Elvish* thing is... but you've learned from those long ears too, then?]

[Yeah, something like that. I don't randomly attack people, so please don't worry about that.]

[Hmm.]

Hearing my response, the man answered back halfheartedly.

We can communicate with each other, but it doesn't appear that he cares about me.

What had sliced through the behemoth's neck was a weapon fashioned out of a giant boulder.

I'm not sure if I'd call it an axe or a sword, but it's definitely a very large and roughly processed weapon.

And it was able to slice off the behemoth's neck even though my fangs could barely pierce it.

No, what's even more strange is that he leapt at least ten meters off the ground while wielding that huge weapon. No matter how muscular he is, that should be impossible.

He did something that should have been impossible.

In other words, he was a magus as well.

—And one with herculean strength, at that.

To be honest, I don't have any confidence in winning against him.

[Hey, you shits. Get out here and work on this thing.]

When the man raised his arms overhead and yelled out, ten or so men appeared and started dismantling the behemoth's body.

[Please wait. That's prey we attacked first. We're fine with just taking a part of it, so could we split it up?]

I'd be troubled if the thing we spent this much time hunting was taken away just like that.

[What's that?]

The large man spoke in dissatisfaction and gave me a piercing glare.

The pressure I felt from his glare was way worse than what I felt

from the armored bear's.

I honestly felt horrified enough to start trembling, but I resolved myself and glared back at him.

... I was prepared to take off into the air at the drop of a hat, though.

[Eh, sure. I finished it off so easily thanks to you flailing about, after all.]

Saying that, the man ordered his subordinates to leave one of its hind legs to us.

My heart still pounding, I felt relieved. It was a large enough portion that even if we distributed it to everyone in the village, we'd have enough for several days and then some. It would've been impossible for us to return home with all of it anyway, so this result is good enough.

[Thanks. It's a big help.]

I signaled for Guy-san and the others to come and get the behemoth's leg.

[Hey, you.]

I heard the man speak from behind me as we started to carry the meat back.

He's not going to say that he changed his mind, right?

[Want to come to my village?]

What I heard when I looked back toward him was, unexpectedly, an invitation.

Chapter 14: Horribly Awry

*That man was strong, wise, and beautiful.
However, even if just by a little,
he was also too nice.*

[This is amazing...!]

[Right?]

Hearing my involuntary remark, the man—who appears to go by Darg—grinned with a laugh.

What laid before my eyes was a remarkably different village than ours.

Many triangular buildings were lined in a row. From their looks, they were pit-houses.

Trails of smoke rose into the sky from here and there while woman carrying earthenware and men carrying bows roamed about.

There were at the very least a few dozen people living here, maybe even upwards of a hundred.

It was a splendid village.

My chest filled with hope at the thought that if we could merge with this village, our population issues could be solved all at once.

[I'm back!]

Hearing Darg's well-known voice in the village, the villagers gathered together.

As expected, or rather as was natural, he was this village's leader.

The villagers all had the same physique as Guy-san and the others. It was just Darg that was so abnormal.

Given that I was somewhat insecure about what I'd do if a ton of men similar to him came out, I felt relieved.

[Take it.]

When Darg waved towards the behemoth's meat, the women grunted in response to show that they understood.

I cocked my head to the side upon seeing that.

[What're you doing? Follow.]

[Ah, yeah. I'm coming.]

My thoughts interrupted by Darg's voice, I followed behind him in a panic.

Reaching the village's center, I saw a building constructed to be noticeably larger than the others.

The floor was dug out slightly with the roof constructed in a pyramid-like shape. There was nothing that could be called furniture, only some straw spread out across the ground and a few earthenware items.

[Hmm? Sit. A meal is on the way.]

Saying that, Gar lowered himself onto the straw.

The house might be this big simply to house his large build.

Even I could sit down in it without feeling cramped.

[Still though, what you did back there was amazing. For you to be able to sever the neck of such a large creature...]

[It's nothing to fuss about.]

[Can anyone else do the same thing then?]

[Not likely, eh?]

Darg answered my question along with a derisive smile.

[Why are you the only one who's so big and strong?]

[Because that's how it is.]

As expected, he's similar to me and Nina in that he's a [Natural Magus].

It's wasn't due to technology or study, it was due to his own talent.

[What about you? Are there many big lizards that talk?]

[No, that's just me.]

To be precise, dragons do have their own language.

But even so, I haven't met any dragons other than mother. So, at the very least, there being many of us isn't the case.

Thinking about it more, it was natural. If there were so many over-engineered creatures in the same place, their surroundings would quickly be left bereft of food.

Which is probably another reason why mother urged me into leaving the nest after ten years.

[Heh.]

Even though Darg was the one to ask, he simply responded halfheartedly.

It was around that point that our food was brought to us.

[Ooh... this is...]

I started to speak out in admiration.

Because it was a soup made out of various wild plants, mushrooms, and beast meat poured into a clay pot.

This is the first time since I've come to this world that I feel like I've seen its [Cuisine].

[It's delicious, try it.]

[Yeah...]

As he recommended me to do, I poured the soup into my mouth.

I had a sensitive tongue when it came to heat in my previous life, so I was happy at being reborn as a red dragon, something that would never be burned by eating even the most steaming hot foods.

“Ooh...!”

Tasting it on my tongue, I let out a groan.

Even while being so chewy, the wild plants weren’t overpowering at all.

The dried meat oozed flavor the more I chewed it, the mushrooms’ ability to exude a mellow taste as they melted when they touched my tongue was mysterious.

And the soup that was able to merge all of them together was delicious. Very delicious.

As though nourishment permeated into my core the moment it touched my tongue, it was delicious enough that I trembled. I feel like I’d gulp down however much of this they could give me.

Since they headed back to the village, I feel sorry for Guy-san and the others for not being able to try this.

[You’re just a lizard, but you can still tell it’s delicious, eh?]

Seeing me gulp it down and sigh in satisfaction, Darg made a comment.

Now that he mentions it, it’s true. It feels like it might be due to there being no recreational amusement besides meals, but in my previous life, I was rather uninterested when it came to food. Maybe it’s because dragon tongues are better than human tongues?

[Could you tell me how this is made?]

I asked the woman who brought us the soup.

However, she only looked back at me with a puzzled expression.

I suddenly recalled that sense of incompatibility I felt when I arrived at this village.

Could it be...

[This person doesn't know the language?]

[Yeah, that's right.]

Darg shouldn't be the only one that knows how to speak.

At the very least, the men that went with him were able to follow his orders.

Which means they understood what he was saying.

[You didn't teach the women language?]

[Of course not?]

Darg frowned, his brows knit in confusion.

What's this guy talking about?

That's what his expression seemed to say.

[What meaning is there in teaching women how to speak?]

I somehow managed to keep myself from grimacing.

I kept telling myself that there's nothing I could do about it.

This world and the era it's in dictates that that line of thought was mostly reasonable.

[Seeing how you like eating that, what do you think of this?]



As I was thinking about a few depressing things, Darg showed me a large pot with something that smelled good in it.

[What's this?]

Smelling a mysterious scent I hadn't smelled before, I sniffed it.

It was like fruit, yet far more potent. However, it was a different kind of sweetness than what candies had. It was more rich and had more of a depth to it.

[Try drinking it.]

Urged on, I slowly stretched my tongue out to it and licked it despite the anxiety and anticipation to this unknown substance.

Immediately after, lightning coursed through my body.

“Th-this is...”

The first thing I experienced was the mellow and rich sweetness of berries. Not just on my tongue, but within my nasal cavity as well.

Then, a moment after that, a stinging stimulation tickled my throat.

But it wasn't something that felt unpleasant.

No, it actually felt like I wanted to have more. I inclined the pot towards me.

It felt as though my throat grew hot and like vitality was bursting from my belly.

“This... is alcohol?”

By the time that wound up drinking enough to fill a cup, I finally realized it.

I hardly enjoyed drinking alcohol at all in my previous life. I didn't much like its taste and just one or two cups was enough to make my face redden.

But what about this promising flavor? I even felt comfortable simply by exhaling in this pleasant aftertaste. It's so good that I'm suddenly feeling bad about not being able to enjoy this in my previous life.

[It's a good drink, isn't it? Come now, have more.]

[No, I couldn't possibly...]

Even while saying that, my gaze unintentionally drifted towards the alcohol.

It wasn't just that it was delicious. It felt like my whole body longed for it.

[Don't hold yourself back. A man's generosity includes how much alcohol he offers.]

Darg spoke, he himself drinking some alcohol.

[Maybe just one more...]

I lost to the temptation and took an additional cup.

It goes without saying that it didn't end at just one cup.

"Mm..."

Raising my head up, I realized that I had fallen asleep.

"Crap."

When I jumped to my feet, I wasn't in my usual house, but in Darg's.

Fortunately, I could still remember everything.

I got drunk and didn't fight my drowsiness, instead listening to Darg's encouragement and wound up falling asleep.

He wasn't in the house, so I reluctantly left the building.

"Wow, it's already this late..."

With the sun high up in the blue sky, I realized that I'd slept till noon.

Had Darg already left for hunting?

I didn't see any men nearby to send him a message and the women wouldn't be able to understand me.

Oh well, Ai and the others are probably worrying about me right now, so let's head back.

Suddenly coming up with an idea, I took off a scale and left it inside Darg's house.

It stung, but it was only about as bad as pulling out a beard hair.

Flapping my wings, I took off into the air. It shouldn't take long to get back if I went through the air.

All things said, I guess I'm still weak against alcohol.

Well, I don't think that drinking four of those large pots could be considered weak, so let's say that I'm weak when it comes to resisting its temptation. But now that I think about it, be it eastern or western myths, dragons being weak against alcohol was basically a standard. I should be more careful.

Nina's probably angry, huh. Ai will be worrying...

Soaring through the sky while thinking about that, I reached Ai and the others' village surprisingly quickly and descended. Now then, time to listen to Nina's scolding...

"Mentor!"

Those thoughts vanished immediately upon seeing Guy-san and the others' injuries and the look on Ken's face.

"Nina, Ai, they—!"

"What's happened?"

Seeing that it obviously wasn't something trivial, my heart started beating rapidly.

"Take away, left!"

It felt as though the ground beneath my feet had collapsed.

Chapter 15: Rage

*Don't get normally gentle people angry.
Even more so if they are dragons.
I didn't know what I'd caused
back then at all.*
—The Sword Division's Founder, Darg

What? No, no way.

I did, what, no—

A myriad of confused thoughts and regrets swirled in my mind.

“Ken. Tell me what happened.”

I asked everyone that saw.

“Who did it?”

I'll regret however much I need later.

“Super, big man... strong man, red hair.”

“So it was him.”

That has to be Darg.

He got me drunk and used that chance to kidnap them.

In that case.

In that case, that was his intention from the moment he invited me to his village.

Even though I was drunk, I can remember everything that happened. I didn't tell him how to get to our village.

Which means that he had his followers chase after Guy-san and the others, got information about the village from me, and came

here either last night or early this morning.

I should still have time.

Hurriedly, I took off into the sky.

“That which protects my all and which shines red in the sunlight. Oh scale of mine, become my ears and let me hear, become my mouth and transmit my voice!”

Dashing through the air with all I had, I composed an impromptu incantation.

It was a magic that would allow me to use the scale I’d left in Darg’s house to send him a message.

Things that were originally part of a whole and had been separated into something else were still connected—it was a very magical way of thinking.

So then wouldn’t a similar thing be possible using this world’s magic?

It failed the first time I tried it out. I’d filled the magic with uncommitted feelings like how it’d be nice if it work back then, but this time I seriously prayed for it to work.

[Release me, you savage!]

As soon as I heard Nina’s assertive command, I truly felt relieved. Hearing her like that, I don’t think she’s experienced anything terrible yet.

[What a noisy girl. This long ear one is boring. Should’ve just brought this one alone...]

[Let go of Ai!]

[Whoops.]

Together with the sound of a sword swinging through the air, I heard something be cut.

[Unfortunate, you can't do anything to me with such a clumsy technique.]

It looks like what did the slashing was a plant that Nina manipulated.

I thought my heart was going to stop there.

[Annoying. I was thinking about gifting you to one of my men, but I'll kill you if you keep on yapping.]

[I'd like to see you try!]

She responded tit for tat.

I can't let that happen!

[Stop!]

The clamor paused the moment I raised my voice.

[Where are you!?!]

[That lizard bastard, eh?]

"Mentor!"

Following that, three voices overlapped each other. Good, it sounds like Ai is for now as well.

[Are you sure? Just try laying a finger on either of them. I'll burn down your village.]

[Hah.]

Darg sneered at my threat.

[Big words for someone that's been afraid of me the whole time.]

He saw through my fear of him.

[Yeah. I'm a coward.]

However.

[Which is why I'm a huge coward when it comes to losing. So, again. Are you sure? I can just rain fire over everything and stay out of your prided strength's reach, it'd be easy.]

I'm not so young that I'd be intimidated by a younger that's not even a quarter my age!

Hearing my dirty threat, even Darg fell silent.

Meanwhile, I flapped my wings and rushed to Darg's village.

"Mentor!"

When I landed in Darg's village, Darg held Ai and Nina back as they tried to run to me.

Both of them were tied up in rope, but neither looked to be noticeably wounded. That neither of them had anything horrible happen to them caused me to feel momentarily relieved.

Our conversation was done in Elvish, so Ai probably doesn't understand the situation that well. She was looking around in unease. Meanwhile, Nina's expression felt more like she was actually worrying about me. I have to say that it does feel like something she'd do, but I would appreciate it if she stopped being so unreasonable despite being tied up like that.

[Give them back.]

[Sure.]

Holding up the same boulder-made sword as before, Darg spoke.

[But you'll have to beat me for them.]

[Why should I accept a condition like that?]

[I kept my word. Now it's your turn to do what I say.]

I was worried. I don't think that I could win a close range fight

against him.

Darg's sword had easily ripped through that behemoth's neck. I'm fairly sure it'd go through my scales as well.

I can't to take off into the sky either. He could use that time to jump and quickly catch me.

In other words, willing or not, I have to fight him.

[You were the one that kidnapped them against their wills.]

[So what?]

What should I do? What should I do?

I thought frantically while dragging out the conversation.

[Doing things against another's will is bad. It is your fault, so you have an obligation to return them.]

[Haaah?]

Darg looked like he was facing a fool.

Even if I say so myself, what I just said was idiotic.

In this world, in this age, obligations and ethics were of no use and held no sway.

[What're you on about? I took them. They're mine. Why would I have to give them back?]

His words were frank.

[Well, it doesn't matter. I'll give this one back.]

Saying that, he pushed Nina a little forward.

[In exchange for this one. How bout it?]

... And then jerked Ai closer.

It can't be helped. There's nothing I can do.

I persuaded myself.

[... I understand.]

[What!? What are you saying!?!]

Nina started making noise when I agreed.

[Sorry, Nina.]

I sighed as I looked into her eyes, my head bowing deeply.

Reluctantly, Nina's head hung low.

[Remove this stuff.]

Darg cut open the rope that bound Nina.

[Well then, this girl here is mine. Yeah?]

[Of course...]

I spoke.

[... not.]

[Hah. It's a fight then?]

As usual, Darg brandished his sword.

Because he knew that I was afraid of it.

[Yeah, we'll do just that.]

[What?]

Seeing me nod, Darg knit his brow in suspicion.

[We'll start at my signal. Sound fine?]

[Signal?]

Not answering his question, I stayed standing there and began to recite an incantation.

“That which is more red than my scales, which is even stronger than my fangs, which holds more heat than my blood, and which shines stronger than my eyes—”

[Oi, I said, what’s the signal?]

It can’t be helped. There’s nothing I can do.

“The spear that sings all, the sword that destroys all, the arrow that pierces all, and the hammer that smashes all—”

[What are you grumbling over there?]

Darg didn’t understand me.

Japanese had the concept of spell incantations as well.

“Bundle yourself, wind tightly and bore through creation, create a blinding flash of light—”

Truly. Every last one of them.

Over and over, they treat Ai as some object.

No matter how *normal* or *ordinary* it is for this world and this age, my reasonableness has a limit.

Therefore, me being unable to put up with it... can’t be helped.

Yes, what I persuaded myself about.

Ai is not an object.

She is my important—

“Your name is—”

First pupil!

“**DRAGON BREATH!**”



A flash of light burst from within my throat.

“Haah——”

[Hah... ..]

After everything settled, Darg and I stared at each other.

“Haha...”

[Hah, hah, hah.]

Both of us started to laugh.

“Hahahahaha!”

[Hahahahahahahahaha!]

We couldn’t do anything but laugh.

“Th-this isn’t something to laugh about!”

Yeah. Guessing that I would breath out my fire by my gestures, she grabbed Ai and ran to the side to escape it. This was the fruit of her being doused in my sighs many times.

That flash... my full powered breath broke Darg’s sword into pieces, blew away the house behind him to dust, continued on to the forest behind him by carving out a cylindrical hole, then finally opened up a beautiful ventilation hole in the side of the mountain beyond that.

It was something that you could do nothing but laugh at.

[Next time... *That*, will be aimed at *you*.]

Darg immediately dropped to his knees upon hearing my threat.

Chapter 16: The Cowardly Dragon

*Just as how I can see what cannot be seen,
there are things that I cannot do.*

What will he do now?

[I give up. It's my loss!]

Standing before Darg as he let his head fall forward and placed his hands against the ground, I wasn't sure what I should do.

I should kill him here and now if I want to sever my anxiety about being deceived again in the future.

However, can I kill a person? I don't think I can.

If I could, I would have erased him with that attack.

I even ended up avoiding him with it despite feeling so much rage.

There's also the fact that Ai and Nina were unharmed. It was the same with Guy-san and the others; although they were somewhat injured, they weren't injured enough to threaten their lives. If something had actually happened to them or the girls, I believe I just might have ended him in my anger.

However, no one suffered any real harm and it's already impossible for me to do something like that now that I've settled down.

And most importantly, I really do not want to kill someone in front of Ai.

That is not something I can do, not as her teacher. This, I firmly believe.

[... Alright. That's enough.]

[Enough...?]

Darg looked up at me, speaking very carefully.

I don't think he knows about the notion of prostration, but neither his current posture nor my mood are very good.

[So long as you do not do anything like this again, I will overlook what happened this time.]

When I said that, Darg stared at me in puzzlement.

[Overlook...? In what meaning?]

[If you don't do anything else, I won't do anything else either.]

[You won't kill me, and you won't take the women?]

[Correct.]

It seemed as though it was a difficult way of thinking for Darg to understand.

He kept blinking his eyes and tilting his head back and forth.

[I don't get it. What do you get out of it?]

[Nothing. I simply don't want to believe that taking something from another is the natural thing to do.]

[What...]

Looking both stumped and confused, Darg spoke with a strange look to his face.

[Don't you think that I'll attack you all again?]

[If you want to die, I am fine with granting you your wish.]

[Wait! That's not what I meant!]

When I took a firm step forward and said that, Darg shook his hands in front of him as he backed away in a panic.

[Good. If you don't reflect on what you've done and break this promise, you will not have another chance.]

True, I may be naive.

I also recognize that I am coward.

But this is because Darg hadn't broken my last line.

[And if that time comes, I will make you regret being born in this world.]

I didn't entirely intend for it to happen, but flames wound up coming out together with my words.

If he goes against me and attacks yet again, I'd have no reason to forgive him.

Rather, if he does, I won't hold back in the least.

I wonder if he grasps the weight of my words?

Darg did nothing but stare at my face, his eyes opened wide.

He suddenly stood up and approached me slowly.

Just as I began to wonder if he actually intended to resume the fight, it happened.

[Brother!]

Darg abruptly clasped my arm and said that.

[Can I call you Brother!?!]

[... Huh?]

That Elvish word wasn't one that indicated kin.

He used a word that indicated personal respect, a special title of sorts.

[Up till now, I never thought that there would be anyone stronger

than me. I believed that because I was strong, it didn't matter who I took what from. That's why now that I've lost, the natural thing to do was for you, the person who's stronger than me, to take my life.]

His eyes shining, Darg continued speaking somewhat fervently.

[But... you're different. Someone who's truly strong. You don't even steal. Even without doing that, you are living. You're so confident that you aren't even anxious about letting your enemies free!]

[W-well... I guess so...?]

I honestly just feel like it's something that any modern peace-loving idiot would do, but he wasn't exactly wrong with his favorable interpretation of it.

[I want to attain a strength like yours. So, can I call you Brother?]

[Uhh, I mean, you can call me what you want...]

I said that, but I only answered like that because I couldn't cast away the suspicion that this might be some sort of trick to get me to lower my guard against him.

[Really!? Thank you!]

Darg leapt into the air in delight, looking much like a child.

Seeing that, I suddenly recalled a certain thing.

[The one eternally by your side, yet unable to be seen by sight. With thorns yet no petals and with fangs yet no mouth, my foe shall become my ally. Do you pledge to be that person?]

[Mm? What do you mean?]

Unable to understand the meaning of the incantation I recited in Elvish, Darg cocked his head to the side.

[I asked if you could swear on never going against us again.]

[Oh, of course then. I'll never go against Brother ever again!]

He nodded earnestly, but there weren't any visible changes.

... Damn. I improvised the incantation and forgot to include something into it that would allow me to check if it was successful.

[Could you please try punching me?]

[Eh? Why?]

[Don't worry and just do it.]

Him being confused about me telling him to do that immediately after having him say he wouldn't oppose me was to be expected, so he looked at me in doubt while swinging his fist.

[Gah!?!]

“Guh!”

Together with a dull impact, both of us groaned in pain.

... It hurt a lot more than I thought it would.

I thought that he wouldn't be able to damage me through my scales without that sword of his, but that wasn't the case at all. My cheek started throbbing, the pain coming and going like a pendulum's swing.

[The heck!? My body hurts a ton!]

It looks like the magic was successful.

What I pictured was a painful deterrence to attacking us, something that would activate whenever he tried doing so.

[Looks like it worked. It'll hurt like that if you ever try to attack us, so be careful.]

[That's fine and all... but did I actually need to go and hit you? It hurt before I even swung my fist.]

He punched me despite feeling the pain? What amazing willpower.

[I was making you undergo some pain as an experiment, so I felt it was only right for me to feel some as well.]

When I gave that as my answer to him, Darg burst up laughing.

[Haha, we really aren't enemies, ahahahaha.]

It was a pure kind of laughter, one not tainted by derision.

“Ready? Make sure you hold on tight.”

“Okay.”

I felt Ai hold on to one of the spines on my back tightly.

I knew that it was being touched, but I couldn't feel much through it. Similar to hair.

I was both thankful and sad about that fact.

“What are you waiting for? Stop being so slow and come on!”

“Hold up, I can't maneuver as well as you.”

I unfurled my wings as I responded to Nina who was flying over me in the sky.

Flapping them powerfully, my body propelled itself into the sky in one go and hurling past Nina in the blink of an eye.

“Eh? Ah, hey, hold up!”

“Stop being so slow and come on, then!”

Using her own words against her in a joking tone, I flapped my wings once again and opened a huge distance between us. Now that I think about it, this is the first time I've flown side by side with Nina.

“Ai, are you alright? It's not too scary, right?”

“I’m okay.”

—It’s also the first time I’ve flown with anyone but Nina on my back.

“... I’m sorry for scaring you.”

“Eh? But I’m not afraid?”

Hearing Ai’s confused response, I shook my head.

“Not that. You having to go through such a horrible experience was entirely my fault.”

I told her everything.

That I did as Darg told me and followed him to his village.

That I fell asleep, drunk due to the alcohol’s influence.

That he mocked me because of my weak attitude.

Each and every step of the way, it was my responsibility.

“But I wasn’t, I wasn’t afraid.”

Ai repeated herself in a gentle tone.

“Because I was sure you would come to save us, Mentor.”

“That’s just what you think after knowing the results...”

Although it ended up going well, she might have went through something terrible if I made even a single mistake.

Just then, Ai giggled.

“Ai...?”

“Sorry, it’s just funny.”

Holding back her laughter, she continued.

“Because, Mentor. Isn’t magic something that creates the result you want directly?”

Ai’s words caught me by surprise.

It definitely was as she says.

If fire’s combination with oxygen causing heat and light was science, magic was something that would simply produce that same heat and light from nothing.

I couldn’t hide my surprise at her suddenly understanding magic so deeply.

“Which is why this result was bound to happen.”

Ai continued forward, speaking with pride.

“After all, my Mentor is the number one Magus in the world!”

“... You’re overestimating me. I’m not that great.”

“No!”

Ai denied me with a tone that left no room for me to talk back.

“There is no person that’s stronger, more gentle, or more wonderful than Mentor.”

This was something that concerned me.

“I’m not a person though, am I?”

Cracking a joke to hide my embarrassment, Ai put all her strength into her embrace on the spine on my back.

“Even so, Mentor, more than anyone, I—”

At that moment, the wind suddenly picked up.

The sound of the air blowing past us drowned out Ai’s voice.

“Sorry. Did you say something just now?”

I asked as such.

“... No.”

And Ai responded as such.

“Nothing at all.”

She just shook her head.

Ahh...

—I truly am a coward.

Chapter 17: Growth



*I've been treating you as a child this whole time,
so you missed out on something important.*

Hearing the sound of wooden boards being struck together, I woke up with a start.

It was the signal that something invaded the area near the village.

Likely having woken up at the same time as me, Nina dashed out of the small house neighboring mine.

“The enemy is to the south, just outside of the village.”

Running side by side with me, Nina found their exact position by listening to the trees' voices.

“Their numbers—”

Her words were interrupted as the forest's trees were thrown down one after another.

Following that, the fence surrounding the village was burst open.

“... Just one.”

Looking at the beast that had appeared directly before her, Nina spoke with an irked expression.

It's because her memories concerning this type of beast weren't too good.

What invaded the village was an armored bear.

Moreover, its size was bigger than the one Nina and I had encountered when we met.

"Nina, I'll leave the villagers' safety to you."

"Mm. You'll probably be alright, but be careful..."

"Please wait."

Leaving my back to Nina and taking a step forward, a bell-like voice held me back.

"Mentor. Could you leave it to me?"

It was Ai.

"... Alright. But don't push yourself too much."

"Okay."

Nodding happily, Ai moved in front of me.

Nina didn't have much of an objection to it either.

Having stopped moving due to my glare, the armored bear was angered by seeing such a small human take the stage and rushed forward with a growl.

The usually cautious and humble Ai asking to do something like this was rare.

Me wanting to respect her request was the reason I didn't stop her.

"My arms, like a bear's; my legs, like a deer's; my skin, like a

rock; my strength—”

It was also simply because both Nina and I knew how strong she was.

“—like a dragon’s!”

Ai caught the armored bear’s paw with her bare hands. It was three or four times taller than her, but rather than being pushed back, Ai’s arms actually forced the armored bear backward.

“Huooh!”

Following her yell, the armored bear flew into the air. Hurling back several meters, it once again crashed into the fence.

“He who is clad in ice clothing, who sheds autumn’s leaves, and who melts in spring’s light, the spirit of both ice and snow, Jack Frost! Grasp it with your palm and dye it with your breath!”

Ai stuck out both her palms towards the armored bear and a fierce blizzard shot out, fully covering the armored bear in snow in the blink of an eye and causing it to freeze solid.

“Tomorrow, we’re having bear stew!”

Taking a few more seconds to make sure that the armored bear wasn’t going to start moving again, Ai looked back and did a triumphant pose.

“... I thought she was raised as a kind woman. Man, not even I can win against her anymore.”

“So slow. Why’re you so late?”

Nina complained at Darg, who’d said that with a slight tremble.

“It’s not like I had to do anything, right?”

He shrugged his shoulders, looking at Ai drag the frozen armored bear with a smile on her face.

He'd lowered himself after recognizing that he lost against me, but he's been deliberately laudable recently after being urged forward by Ai's development.

—It's been five years since then.

And it's been a bit over six years since I took Ai in.

There were a few conflicts, but in the end, Darg's village and ours merged together.

Darg's village was one formed entirely through his own charisma and strength.

As he went under me and became my follower, none of his people had much of a problem with it and we were able to merge without many issues at all.

I thought that Darg would be crude, quick-tempered, and egoistic, but he was actually unexpectedly amiable to the people in his group.

He might treat them as possessions, but it does also at least mean that he doesn't hurt them, instead putting his own life on the line to protect them.

On the whole, he isn't a bad guy to have around.

Darg's village wasn't the only one that merged with ours, either.

There was a village that wished to join us because they were unable to provide a sufficient amount of food for themselves.

There were also villages that considered us a foreign enemy and attacked.

Darg was most useful whenever that happened.

After all, they could tell that they were no match against him just by looking at him.

While I would do the same in that respect, him being of the same

race as them was even better. They might fight to the bitter end thinking that I'd eat them since I'm a dragon, but since Darg was just barely human enough, they would surrender quickly.

... Well, the most effective thing to do was for both of us to threaten them together.

Like that, the population of our village increased steadily and rapidly, bringing us to over a thousand people. Taking the standard of this age into account, it's probably fine to consider this as a top-class population level.

"You're our security officer, do your job."

Nina's sermon continued as I was reminiscing over the past few years.

"C'mon. You didn't have to make me the officer of anything."

Darg shot Ai a quick glance.

"This village has four strong magus in it after all."

Just on time, a youth ran over to the girl.

"Sis, are you alright!? Let me take it."

Having completely overtaken Ai in height, the young Ken tried to take over the armored bear's corpse from her.

"I'm fine. I can do it."

However, Ai had easily warded his hand away with her weak-looking arms. Seeing as how she has the strength of a dragon right now, it's no wonder.

"Mentor, you too. Don't make her do something so dangerous."

He aimed his verbal attack at me as I was thinking about that.

"Even if you say that, she herself said she wanted to do it and she more than has the ability to do so. You're not a child anymore, so

don't disregard her feelings and unilaterally try to stop her."

Ken stared at me discontentedly when I said that.

"Not a child..."

Muttering to himself, he ran off.

Still silent, Nina walked over to me and elbowed my side.

"Yeah, I know..."

Although our livelihood and the magic academy were going well, there were still things that caused me distress.

I was deeply aware of that fact.

* * *

"Sis!"

I, who was heading over to chase after Ai, stopped moving when I heard Ken's voice.

"What's wrong?"

Hearing Ai's soft tone, I could picture her expression in my head.

I could hear her clear as day with my ears, but she was far beyond my visible range.

It was an exchange happening far in the distance.

I feel a bit uneasy about how this seems like eavesdropping though.

But I wasn't exactly able to make an appearance, nor could I plug my ears and leave.

"... No matter what, I'll help you."

"Thanks, but if anyone other than me touches it, they'll cling to it and freeze."

She was probably talking about the armored bear she was dragging along. As a woman that could manipulate the cold at will, she herself also seemed to have formed a resistance to it. It's similar to how I won't get burned.

"Not just that! Everything... always. I want to help you."

Ken spoke zealously and straight to the point, similarly to how he manipulated fire.

"I love you, Sis. Please, be my wife."

His words went as I thought they would.

My legs freezing in place was also as I thought they would.

"Thank you. I'm very happy to hear your feelings, Ken."

"Then...!"

"But I'm sorry."

... And Ai's response was, again, what I thought it would be.

"Why... why, am I that useless...?"

His question sounded entirely like a lamentation, yet Ai was unable to respond.

Hearing Ken's footsteps sound as though his strength had been drained, I took a deep breath.

* * *

Outside of the village to the north was the cave that Guy-san and the others had once lived in.

This small cave that had been filled with just ten-odd people was now used as an ice room.

With the entrance sealed up with clay and only a small entrance inside, cold magic was regularly used inside it.

I'd previously used pots as a substitute for a freezer, but it was tough using magic on each one individually. They were also bulky and bad at insulating themselves from outside heat. Although turning the cave into an ice house solved all of those problems in one go, what made it possible was Ai's earnest progress with her magic.

It appeared that magic has something similar to aptitude.

Just like how I couldn't use cold magic at all and how Nina was exceptionally skilled with manipulating plants, each and every person had some kind of magic they were and weren't suited to.

Darg and Guy-san were practically blank slates for anything that wasn't magic that enhanced their own body, while Ken was good at fire magic. And Ai was our village's best magus at using cold magic.

She was rather hard working, so wasn't limited to only using cold magic and could use various kinds, but she was particularly skilled at it. Of everyone in our village, she's the only one that could use magic to cool down the entire cave. Not even Nina could create the blizzards she's able to.

"Hey, Ai—"

Lifting up the hanging fur that was acting as the door, I found myself at a loss for words when I saw Ai come out of the ice house.

"Mentor. Is something wrong?"

Her clothes were adorned by many separate slivers of ice, each shining and glittering in the moon's light and bringing about a mysterious goddess-like beauty.

"... No."

Unable to say that I was awed by her appearance, I shook my head.

"It felt like you were charmed by me, though?"

My thoughts easily seen through, I coughed.

“Yeah. You’ve gotten beautiful.”

—Truly.

“Thank you. Even if it’s just a compliment, that makes me happy.”

Her smile as she said that truly was charming.

And it was troubling.

It had only been six years.

In that short amount of time, that young girl had matured into a beautiful woman.

The hair that she’d had in a quirky short cut now fell to her waist, lustrous.

Her body had changed from its flat, skin and bones look similar to that of a boy’s, to a curved, womanly appearance.

Her features still gave the feeling of innocence, as well a gentle allure.

“Ken is a good boy.”

“I know.”

Hearing what I said, her smile vanished, immediately to be replaced with a stern tone.

Exactly because she’s this attractive, she’d had to turn down not just Ken, but many other men.

The fact that she had turned them all down was something that I knew.

As well as what was likely her reason for doing so.

“I... I want you to be happy.”

Of course, just getting married and having a child is not

happiness.

Yet even so, I want her to live and experience ordinary happiness as well.

“Mentor, I—!”

At that moment, something white fell down on to Ai’s nose.

Seeing things floating down on us from above, we looked up into the sky.

“Snow...?”

“This... is snow? It’s the first time I’ve...”

The climate around here was warm, it hadn’t snowed here up till now at all, not even in the winter. I’d taken Ai to see snow that had accumulated on the top of a mountain so that she could understand what snow was, but this should be the first time she’s ever seen it falling.

“Hoh hoh hoh.”

A strange voice came from inside the ice room.

“Hoh hoh hoh.”

It lifted up the fur pelt at the entrance with sluggish movements, once again making that sound.

“Jack Frost...?”

Ai muttered into the air.

As though to answer her, the fur froze over.

Chapter 18: The Ice Spirit

*Walking on frost and accompanied by ice, he appears with the snow.
But the most wicked thing about him
is that he looks so cute.*

“Hoh, hoh, hoh.”

It crept out of the ice room slowly, as though to see what we were doing.

Each time it took a step, needles of ice would appear at its feet. Touched by its hands, the ice room’s walls froze.

It wasn’t too tall. Around the same height as Ai, perhaps?

It had a big, round head sitting above its round body. Its mantle had icicles hanging from it. Staring into its black round eyes was like staring into the abyss, its emotions unreadable.

“What the...”

I muttered.

It was a being entirely unknown to me for this world. Bears, deers, rabbits, names like that could be applied to just about all of the animals here. The evolutionary trend headed toward much larger bodies, more feet, or more horns, but it could all be explained simply by thinking of the trend as being more diverse.

I could understand that the things living here were similar. Evolution would converge on certain things according to function. Birds needed wings to fly in the sky, for example. Not even in this magical world would something as basic as that change. Magic was something born from the development of their original capabilities, after all.

But then there’s *this*.

Jack Frost was a fictitious existence. That is, one from Earth's fiction.

“Mentor.”

Her eyes fixed on Jack Frost, Ai whispered, her tone firm.

“Please, run.”

Jack Frost opened his mouth and a terribly cold wave of air blew out from it.

Driven by reflex, I opened my mouth wide and spewed fire against it. The flames and storming cold air collided with each other, negating themselves.

“... No way!?”

However, my flames couldn't last against the never ending flurry as they started to dwindle. After all, me breathing fire was me exhaling. I quickly took a hold of Ai, unfurled my wings, and took to the sky.

“What in the world is he?”

“Mentor, this won't work! We have to land!”

Together with the falling snow, a storm blew against my body. I made an effort to stabilize myself by flexing my wings, but I wasn't able to move them well due to the freezing cold.

I started to spin in circles as I fell toward the ground.

Bad, this is very bad! I have to do something!

I embraced Ai closely, wrapping my tail and wings against her so that I could at least protect her.

However, the impact I felt several moments later wasn't the crash I had expected. I'd been caught by soft branches and leaves.

“What're you doing?”

“Nina!”

Standing on the elongated branch like a little bird, Nina looked down at me.

“Ooooooh! Raaah!”

Hearing a barbarous cry come from below me, I looked down.

Darg had just sliced Jack Frost in two with his crag blade.

A burst of snow scattered and Jack Frost crumbled apart.

But immediately after that, snow clumped together and formed the snowman once again.

“What!?”

Darg opened his eyes wide and slashed at it again, as well as taking a distance.

“Brother, what the hell is this thing!?”

“Well... I don’t know, either.”

I understand that it’s Jack Frost.

I understand that, but what is it?

A demon? An apparition? A sprite?

Even in this world that has dragons in it, this is the first time I’ve seen a creature that doesn’t die from falling apart like that.

“Brother, can you deal with it with your flames?”

“His breath was stronger.”

“Wha—!? Stronger than *that*?”

Darg was probably recalling the matter from five years ago. He took a glance at the ventilation hole still in the side of that mountain.

“The was after I recited an incantation with all I had. What lost against it was a chantless, ordinary breath.”

“Could you defeat it if you use that incantation?”

“I think so, but...”

I answered Nina’s question with a shake of my head.

“Even a short incantation would probably blast away the ice house.”

“Let’s think of another way then.”

Nina instantly shot down her idea.

Fire was simply too compatible with me.

If I went and used an incantation, I wouldn’t be able to hold back at all.

“I’ll do it!”

The one who broke into the conversation was Ken.

“Ken, you came too?”

True, we might just be able to defeat this Jack Frost with his fire magic.

He’s better than me when it comes to adjusting his output.

“Are you guys done talking!?”

Repeatedly cutting Jack Frost to pieces, Darg shouted out to us.

Even though it immediately reconstructed itself, it wasn’t as though his attacks were entirely useless.

At the very least, it didn’t seem like he could attack while he was destroyed.

However, things froze just by touching his body. Darg’s crag

blade itself was covered in white and his arms were starting to freeze.

Rather, just how is he even swinging his sword in that state?

“I’ll give you a chance then. Ken, take it out in one big shot.”

“Alright.”

Ken nodded and Nina leapt to the ground soundlessly.

“You know.”

He looked my way with and spoke.

“Mentor, you can let Sis down now.”

Hearing him, I finally realized that I was still holding on to Ai.

“S-sorry!”

I hurried down from the tree and let go of her.

“It’s okay... I have to stop, that child...”

After looking down in what appeared to be a trace of embarrassment, her expression hardened as she gazed at Jack Frost.

“Oh trees, roots, branches and leaves! Grow and form a cage!”

Responding to Nina’s incantation, all sorts of roots and trees broke through the ground and enclosed Jack Frost.

However, just because it finished imprisoning him, Jack Frost waved his hand.

That alone was enough to cause what he touched with his palm to freeze.

“Come one! Why’re you growing so slow!”

The plants that usually sprouted up like eager serpents were moving awfully awkwardly.

It was due to the surrounding temperature itself being considerably lower.

“Fire!”

Leaping up, I turned my head to the sky and uttered a single-worded incantation.

A giant fireball erupted from my mouth, illuminating the night sky like a newly born sun.

“Woah... that’s crazy.”

“Oh vines, tangle and twine!”

Rays of heat raining down on the surrounding ice incessantly, it all evaporated in an instant. Nina took advantage of that and caused the nearby ivy to extend towards Jack Frost. The ivy that tangled around him froze the instant it touched his body, fixing it in place.

“That which extends its tongue of red, which is clad in garments of flame, oh salamander, consume it as kindling—”

Jack Frost slowly turned to look at Ken, who was reciting an incantation.

Then, a snowstorm blew from his crescent-shaped mouth.

“Icy mantle of frost, to me!”

Immediately following Ai’s quick shout, icicles stood towering before Ken like a shield.

... Right. If it’s just for defense, isn’t ice more effective than fire?

“Use your tongue to bore through and eradicate it with your breath!”

Ken, completing his incantation, fired off an unbelievably hot ball of fire from his fingertip.

It easily penetrated the ice pillars Ai had produced, as well as continued on to pierce Jack Frost in the same manner.

The sound it make was like a red-hot metal rod being thrust into water, Jack Frost disappearing without a trace.

“Phew, you did it...”

“Looks like it.”

After confirming that it wouldn’t sprout back up, Darg thrust his sword into the ground and caught his breath.

Nina seemed to lose her tension as well.

I could finally calm down.

“Still though, Brother, to think that you were too strong was the problem.”

“I’m really not good at regulating my fire. Even so, I can handle average opponents with my ordinary breaths and my claws.”

I should probably come up with some attacks that use something other than fire.

I’m alright at manipulating wind, but it’s not too suitable for attacking with since air is too light.

“Sis, what’s wrong?”

“Nothing, it’s nothing...”

Ai shook her head.

Her words made it sound as though she was thinking about something.

I wonder what it was?

She turned to me.

“Umm... Mentor. Could we talk for a moment?”

“Oh, sure. I don’t mind.”

“Then let’s go to my house.”

I nodded and started to follow her back to the village.

“Can... we not hear it, too?”

Just then, Ken stopped us.

“It’s not that you... can’t.”

“Then—!”

“Hey.”

Nina rose her voice as she looked up into the sky, cutting Ken off.

“It didn’t stop snowing?”

A flake of snow floated down and landed on her outstretched palm.

Following that, the snow that was falling down whirled together, gathering in one place.

Reforming from the head down, Jack Frost’s mouth drew into the shape of a crescent moon.

Ai’s actions as she turned around from facing me... they felt like they were in slow motion.

“Don’t!”

She spread her arms wide and shouted.

And a white wind was blown.

The next instant, Ai’s body had frozen completely solid.

Chapter 19: A Guiding Fetish

*Do you have someone you hate?
A nail, a strand of hair, a drop of blood.
Pick whichever you like, bring it to me
and I'll curse them.*
— Shaman Sawari

“Ai!”

Calling her name with a voice close to a shout, I blew out flames to melt the ice.

But far from melting under the heat of my breath, it even continued to enlarge as it engulfed Ai, turning into a large pillar-like crystal.

“Hoh, hoh, hoh.”

Jack Frost let out a happy-sounding noise and bounced upward.

Its round body floated buoyantly as it ran away, looking as though it was sliding through the air.

“Ah! Get back here!”

Darg chased off after him. Jack Frost had taken to the air in order to escape, so I, as someone who could fly the best of us all, should have been the one to do the chasing.

However, that's something I simply couldn't do.

“Ai, Ai! Dammit... what should I do!?”

No matter how much I breathed on it, the ice pillar didn't melt.

“Mentor, move aside!”

His incantation complete, Ken blasted a large ball of fire against Ai.

I was about to say something about what he intended to do if he burned her, but when I saw the result, my worrying was unneeded.

Not even Ken's magic had caused so much as a drop of water to melt.

"That which is more red than my scales..."

"Cut that out!"

Now that it's come to this, all I can do is use an incantation. Just as I started putting that thought into action, Nina pulled on my tail with a jerk.

"You probably would manage to melt it, but you might end up doing the same to Ai along with it!"

"But if we don't...!"

Her entire body was covered in ice, there's no way she could be able to breathe in it.

Suffocation causes damage to the brain if it doesn't get oxygen within five minutes. We don't have time to be slow here!

"I think she'll be alright, even if we don't rush. Mmm, like what happens to trees when they shed their leaves."

However, starkly contrasting my impatience, Nina was odiously serene.

"... Like hibernation?"

"Yeah yeah, like that. *Hibernation*. At the very least, she isn't about to die right away."

Nina's usual flippant wording and attitude managed to bring me back to my senses.

"But are you sure? How do you know that?"

"Eh? You tell from looking though?"

... It looks like I'll need to hear more about how from her later on.

“But it's not like we can just wait for spring to come. Do you know how we could melt the ice?”

“It should melt on its own if we defeat that thing.”

I also felt like that's how it'd be.

Though it might be better to say that I only barely thought of it, rather than truly knew it.

“But for us to defeat it... it didn't even die when it was blasted to bits. How could we kill it...”

“Why not just burn it as many times as it takes?”



“... The answer was that simple...?”

Snow was, in short, frozen water. Water doesn't disappear when it evaporates, it just turns into a gas. That should be the reason Jack Frost was able to revive himself like that.

If we assume that fire is just as useless as smashing or slicing him, what should we do?

“Shit! Sorry, Brother! I lost sight of the bastard!”

Darg came running back, panting.

“I could tell that it was heading outside the forest though...”

The village was surrounded by forest on all sides.

Rather, maybe it'd be better to say that we cut out a part of the forest in order to make the village?

What continued on after the edge of the forest was a vast grassland.

“... That's troublesome.”

Between a forest or a grassland, it'd be easier to hide in the forest.

However, that kind of common sense didn't apply to us.

Because we have the incarnation of the forest, the trees' chosen child, Nina.

Whether he tried hiding in a bush, in the trees, or underground, so long as he was in the forest, finding him would be as easy as Nina flipping over her hand.

But when it comes to searching through those vast grasslands, Nina's power is useless.

There's almost no lighting in this primitive age to light the dark, so I wouldn't even see anything from the sky.

“We'll have to wait for morning. I'll keep an eye on Ai, so you get some rest.”

“But...”

Jack Frost might not be in the grasslands by the time morning

comes around.

No, it wouldn't be strange even if he'd already left it.

I didn't feel like just laying down at a time like this would help anything.

"We know that it's not in the forest. In that case, the only one capable of searching for it is you. I'll wake you up just before the sun rises, so hurry up and get some rest to preserve your stamina."

Nina's argument was so sound that I had no room to rebut it.

But even so, my feelings weren't so willing to bow to logic.

I gazed silently at Ai's figure trapped within the pillar of ice.

Both of her arms were stretched out to her sides with her head down and eyes closed. She looked like a crucified Christ.

She'd protected me.

There's no way I could ever just leave her like this.

But I don't have any idea what to—

"... Wait a second."

Unexpectedly, I realized something.

"That which is rock solid, yet as invisible as the wind. What is stale as a shadow, yet as dazzling as light, I call upon you! Heed my voice, show me your creator's face...!"

I realized something about the ice that had trapped Ai.

Given that my flames couldn't melt it, it couldn't just be ordinary water. It was obviously magical in origin. In other words, it was closely connected to Jack Frost. One might even say that it was a part of him.

There's a magical connection between items and what those items were once a part of, similar to how I transmitted my voice through

a scale of mine a while back. I've decided to call objects like these fetishes.

Fundamentally, you aren't able to use magic on things that are outside of your scope of vision. This is because magic needs you to perceive and realize what something is, so you can't use it on what you can't see.

However, so long as you have one of these charms, you can use magic even on things that you can't see. Nina's ability to monitor everything in the forest is because all of the forest's trees are fetishes to her.

"It worked!"

It was my first time using magic directly on a fetish itself, but I succeeded in tracing it back to him. The surface of the ice pillar displayed Jack Frost as he climbed a mountain. It was the mountain to the south beyond the grassland, but it was transmitting the video of him rather clearly.

"Nina, take this."

I removed one of my scales and handed it to her.

"You know how to use it, right? Please, keep me updated on where he is."

It's not like Jack Frost would just stay still while I spent time catching up to him. I need someone here to keep track of where he goes. Nina should be able to do it as easily as I did.

"... Alright."

Nodding, I spread my wings out wide.

"Wait!"

It was Ken.

"Mentor, please take me too!"

Hearing his plea, I hesitated for a moment.

It's not because I thought he was hostile toward me or anything like that.

It's because although he definitely is a strong Magus, he hasn't had much real battle experience at all.

Meanwhile, although Darg's only able to use physical reinforcement, he is enormously powerful.

Above all, he's accustomed to fighting.

Even if I'm a dragon, I'm still only around three meters long at the most.

I can only carry a single person.

I feel like taking Darg along would be better since we'll be at the top of a mountain and I'll be able to wield my power not having to worry about collateral damage.

"Ken, sorry, but..."

"Brother, take the kid!"

Surprisingly, Darg himself threw Ken a lifesaver.

"I'd only stop that thing from moving at best. The kid should be more useful than me against that thing!"

"Old man..."

"I'm not that old, call me bro."

The two of them knocked fists and grinned at each other.

I envied their relationship a little.

It wasn't a good time for me to do that, though.

"Hold on tight, Ken!"

“Yeah!”

Ken on my back, I took off into the night sky.

“W-o-o-oaaaah...!”

Ken screamed.

“Amazing...!”

I guess it was more of an exclamation than a scream.

Come to think of it, this is the first time I’ve flown with him.

Nina and Ai were the only two other Magus able to fly, so this is probably the first time he’s seen things from this high up.

“... So this is the scenery Mentor always looks at...”

Ken muttered.

“There’s all of it, but nothing we can see.”

To be frank, the night is pitch black.

The moon was out a little while ago, but it’s been hiding behind the clouds so I really can’t see anything at all. I can just barely make out black shapes on the ground below me.

Paying attention so that I wouldn’t crash into anything, I headed for the mountain.

And then I vaguely noticed something floating in the sky.

There weren’t many things that would fly around in a night as dark as this.

Thinking that I may have seen it wrong, I blinked twice and took another look.

Right there, in the dark night—

Was Darg’s. Burly. Butt.

“Pfft!?”

Seeing something so ridiculous, I accidentally spat out fire.

[Nn. It looks like it worked?]

Following that, Nina’s voice came out of it.

“Nina, the heck? What happened?”

Darg’s butt kept floating near me as I flew through the sky.

I didn’t have the presence of mind to think about it much, but honestly, it was seriously unpleasant.

[Telling you in words would be annoying, so I’m showing you what I’m seeing.]

Darg’s butt vanished, but what followed was a close-up of Ai’s bust.

“What you’re seeing, huh... how?”

[Dunno. I just tried it out and it worked.]

This genius...!!

[So yeah. That guy is...]

A finger appeared. Nina was probably looking at her finger.

[Around here on the mountain.]

“... Please don’t illustrate it with her chest.”

What Nina pointed to was the tip of Ai’s bulging chest.

[But it’s easier that way.]

Well, it’s true.

Rather, Nina, aren’t you staring at Ai’s chest too much?

Assuming that whatever appears in this illusion is what she's looking at, she's practically only staring at Ai's chest...

"Either way, thanks. I get where I need to go."

[It doesn't look like he's moving now, so you should be good heading straight for him. I'll let you know if he starts moving again.]

Done talking, she cut off.

"Mentor, is that it?"

Unexpectedly, Ken spoke up after the illusion vanished.

"What?"

"There. *That!*"

It felt like he was pointing forward, but I couldn't exactly see turn around to look at his finger. However, there was still quite a distance to the mountain.

The mountain was so far away that I could barely make out its outline. I've been to it before and know how far away it is, so I couldn't believe he'd spotted something on it.

"What are you talking about?"

"I just said, *that!* Can't you see it? It's so close!"

"Close? Ken, we're currently moving *really* fast. If it's so close, we should've overtaken it a while ago."

We're going so fast that there's nothing I can really compare it to. I've even had to protect him with magic so that he wouldn't get blown off my back. He might've mistaken our speed because of that, but we're actually moving five or six hundred kilometers per hour right now.

"But it's been there this whole time—..."

“But there’s only—...”

We frowned simultaneously.

Because we finally realized.

We realized what we had been misunderstanding from each other.

And that Nina’s information was wrong.

Jack Frost wasn’t at the top of a mountain.

One of the two mountains in front of us *was* Jack Frost.

Chapter 20: Mana Link

*Do you know what he said back
when he blew it off the mountain?*

“Mentor, you really are amazing.”

Yeah. He laughed.

—The Verdant Witch, Nina

“W-was he that big!?”

“Obviously not!”

I definitely do remember there being a mountain there.

Rising into the heavens, it had turned into Jack Frost’s round head, eyes and mouth included.

“Did it absorb the snow at its summit and get bigger...?”

Still though, that’s way too big!

Now that it’s grown this much, wouldn’t I not be enough anymore?

While Ken and I were shuddering at the thought of taking it on, Jack Frost opened its crescent mouth with a rusty machine-like motion.

“Salamander, bring forth your fire!”

“Oh flames, burn everything!”

We each recited our own incantations. Immediately afterwards, a thick snowstorm assailed us.

Our two streams of fire twisted around each other and shot out. It was barely enough to compete against the snowstorm’s strength, but us two combined managed to be on par with it.

—No, it wasn’t enough.

“Mentor...! How long is this going to keep up!?”

With my mouth preoccupied by spewing out flames, I couldn’t answer Ken’s shout.

However, I could tell from his voice that he was also approaching his limit.

Similar to how I’m unable to breath while spewing fire, it’s impossible to continue using magic indefinitely.

Be that as it may, it seemed like Jack Frost’s snowstorm was inexhaustible. If things continued on, we’d lose against the snowstorm and get blasted down to the ground.

It’d be great if we could protect ourselves with ice like Ai did, but I’m incredibly bad when it comes to ice magic. Even if I miraculously managed to succeed in invoking it, I wouldn’t be able to create an ice wall.

What can I do, what...!?

“Kuh—sorry, Mentor!”

Exhausted, Ken’s flames stopped. Just after that, the snowstorm began pushing back my flames and gradually drew closer. I’d tried my best at flying sideways to dodge out of the snowstorm, but Jack Frost was able to change its direction. There were no signs of me being able to get out of it.

My flames would soon reach their limit.

Similar to a collapsing dam, the icy snow surged at us all at once after I stopped spewing fire.

“Split it—”

But just on the verge of getting blasted, I recalled it.

Rather than using the opposite of something to defend against it, it’s easier to manipulate something similar.

So although I couldn't produce ice—

“Wind!”

Manipulating wind was one of my specialties!

The snowstorm split in two and streamed past us to both sides. It's not a type of magic I have to emit from myself, so I'll be able to keep it up for however long I need like this.

Even so, I have to concentrate to be able to accurately divide the snowstorm apart.

So much so that using fire magic as well would be difficult.

“Ken, I'll keep the snowstorm at bay. You attack!”

“Alright!”

I headed toward Jack Frost while tearing apart the wind. Even if it isn't that effective, we have to do something to shrink his giant body.

“That which extends its tongue of red, which is clad in garments of flame, oh salamander, consume it as kindling—”

Listening to Ken's incantation, I suddenly thought of something.

Assuming that there is an ice spirit, wouldn't summoning a salamander—a fire spirit—be able to entirely oppose it?

I immediately scrapped the idea after thinking of it.

It feels like summoning it would be possible.

But I couldn't take the chance of losing control of the salamander.

“The spear that sings all, the sword that destroys all, the arrow that pierces all, and the hammer that smashes all. Bundle yourself, wind tightly and bore through creation, create a blinding flash of light!”

A flash shot out from Ken's outstretched palms.

Easily piercing the fierce storm, it bore through Jack Frost.

“That’s...!”

The second half of the incantation was what I used when I was truly angry at Darg.

“... Mentor, I respect you.”

Panting, Ken unexpectedly said that.

“You’re stronger than anyone, know more than anyone, and are more gentle than anyone. Ever since I was a kid, you’ve been my goal.”

Come to think of it, he was more simple-minded back when I met him five years ago.

“But it’s different for Sis. You know, right? Sis always, always rejects my courtship. Why? Why...”

Yeah.

“—Why, why does she only ever see me as her younger brother?”

Of course I know.

I’ve known for a long, long time.

“So why, why don’t you respond to her!?”

That flash magic must have been a heavy burden for Ken.

“Or maybe... Mentor, do you not think anything of Sis!?”

Out of breath and intermittently firing attacks, he asked me a question.

“Answer me. Without putting on airs, without treating me like a child.”

I-it’s—

“If you don’t, I’ll force—”

“It’s obvious that I like her!”

By the time I realized it, I’d roared out my response.

“There’s no reason that I wouldn’t like such a hard working, gentle, earnest, cute child...!”

“Then why—!?”

“Because I’m a dragon!”

It was something I hadn’t admitted to at all up till now.

“We couldn’t walk together holding hands. We couldn’t have children—I couldn’t even embrace her in my arms.”

Around where the chest and throat meet on a dragon is where the reverse scale was said to be in my previous life.

There isn’t a reverse scale there, but it is instead the location where my body temperature is at its highest. If a human touched it, a simple burn wouldn’t be the end of it. If Ai were to embrace me, that would be where her face rested.

“For such a good child to be forced into being with someone like me... she doesn’t deserve having her life ruined. Don’t you agree?”

This time, Ken said nothing in response to my words.

Just then, several huge pillars of ice appeared around Jack Frost.

Did he change his method of attacking after seeing that he couldn’t kill us with a snowstorm?

Ice arrows... no, those are closer to spears or battering rams. I don’t think I could defend against those with wind.

“Wind—”

But I did have a trick to use.

“Carry my wings!”

If you can’t move your opponent, you can just move yourself to them.

Responding to the intense gust, my body shot up, down, left, and right at high speeds.

However, I wouldn’t be able to avoid it like this forever.

Ice spears were flung toward us one after another, gradually becoming smaller and more frequent, its supply seemingly inexhaustible.

It realized that quantity was more important than quality here.

“Mentor. I understand how you feel, and although I don’t agree with you...”

Sounding like he’d broken through something, Ken spoke.

“Will you lend me your power?”

I didn’t know what he was thinking.

But of one thing, I was sure.

He and I were both thinking about and fighting for Ai from the bottoms of hearts.

“Yeah, of course.”

Therefore, I had no reason to refuse his request.

“That which extends its tongue of red, which is clad in garments of flame—”

Ken began reciting his usual incantation.

“—which has sharp horns, and which is the bearer of sagacious wisdom.”

No, it’s different. His incantation, it’s—

“Oh compassionate salamander, the fire dragon whose strength lords over all—”

—addressing me!

“Grant me your breath and scour that menace with your majesty!”

I felt the heat within my belly soar.

Yeah, sure.

Take it, take it all!

From Ken’s palms shot a giant flame.

It was different from the flash that aimed solely to bundle its power tighter together.

It was a hot, intense crimson flame.

This was the breath of a genuine dragon.

The giant flame wrapped around Jack Frost, evaporating it and all of the flying ice pillars around it, continuing on to burn the entire mountain.

Everything ended up burning.

“... Mentor, you really are amazing.”

Relieved, Ken muttered those words.

“No, not yet!”

I forced my wings back toward me and dove to the mountain’s tip that Jack Frost had been concealing.

The snow still hadn’t stopped.

Sure enough, the falling snow was reforming, trying to revive Jack Frost.

“What should we do!? Mentor!”

Taking a look at it, I was convinced.

This was the place I had brought Ai so that she could see and understand what ice was.

This Jack Frost was something Ai had created after all.

Something she had produced with her magic, something that had gone out of control.

In that case, I have a good solution for this.

I opened my mouth wide and—

Chomp.

—ate Jack Frost.

Thinking back, I had eaten the first magic she’d produced back then as well.

Magic would disappear once it entered my body, something that was itself magical.

Even if that weren’t so, it would constantly be melted by the flames within my body, never getting the chance to reform into Jack Frost.

My conjecture appeared to be correct, as the snow that had been falling in the vicinity stopped immediately.

The dark clouds disappeared with surprising swiftness, allowing the rising sun to shine from beyond the horizon and for it to illuminate the mountaintop.

Chapter 21: Disenchant

*It was the exact opposite of those fairy-tales.
The causes, the genders, even the order of it all.*

“Why!?”

I cried out in spite of myself.

“Why... why isn’t it melting!?”

Yeah.

Even though we killed Jack Frost, Ai remained frozen.

“That Jack Frost guy should be gone now...”

Even Nina was frowning, her tone stiff.

“Yeah. He should be.”

According to Nina, Jack Frost’s reaction vanished a little after I ate him. There wasn’t a reaction even after she casted magic on the ice encasing Ai again, and the snow falling around here disappeared as well.

Rather than believing that Jack Frost had devised some countermeasure against detection magic, it would be better to think that the magic’s effect has continued on even after his disappearance.

But if we assume that, what should we do?

“Mentor.”

The one who came to the place Ai was frozen at was Guy-san, worried.

“Guy-san... sorry. Because of me, Ai...”

“Not, Mentor’s, fault.”

Guy-san shook his head as he spoke with some difficulty.

“But...”

“Mentor.”

Guy-san called my name as I was shaking my head, feeling like I wanted to vanish.

“I, don’t know, magic. I no good, at words, too.”

As he said, he still wasn’t well practiced with his Japanese.

But I understood what he was trying to convey and looked into his eyes.

“But Ai, I know. A little.”

He turned his gaze toward Ai, touching the pillar tenderly.

“I think, Ai did this, herself.”

“Herself? Why would she...”

“To be with Mentor, forever.”

I was shocked at the gravity of Guy-san’s brief statement.

It was all connected.

“That which is rock solid, yet as invisible as the wind. What is stale as a shadow, yet as dazzling as light, I call upon you!”

I uttered an incantation.

Not towards Ai, but towards the ice inside the ice house.

“Please teach me. Teach me what you heard, the words you’ve stored.”

At that moment, countless words streamed toward me.

I finally understood it all.

The only people in this world that knew what Jack Frost looked like was me and Ai.

The two of us visited that snowy mountain.

She had used cold magic over and over in that ice house.

It was conceivable that Jack Frost's manifestation had to do with Ai's magic. However, I was wondering if it was a side effect of her magic or an accidental outcome from using the magic so much.

But I was wrong.

Ai is a very patient child.

I've never seen her complaining or being dissatisfied in front of anyone, not even once.

But it wasn't like she didn't have any complaints to give.

That that was obvious, I hadn't realized at all.

Jack Frost didn't just suddenly appear last night.

It had stayed within that ice house for a long time, listening to Ai express her true thoughts.

Then, when he saw that I wouldn't accept her, he showed himself.

Jack Frost wasn't running away.

In his own way, he was trying to realize Ai's desire.

"... Ai."

I turned to the frozen Ai and placed my paw against the ice pillar.

Ai's height was around a hundred and sixty centimeters.

Although my height was two-ish meters, my head's position at

the end of my neck was a little lower, just enough so that I would look her straight in the eye.

Yeah.

The perspective of this young girl who'd always clung to my forelegs was already the same height as mine.

Meanwhile, I hadn't grown at all.

It wasn't as though I wouldn't grow any further—that much could be seen by looking at mother.

She was more than tenfold my current size.

My lifespan is long. Overwhelmingly so.

Although Ai was now a matured woman, I still hadn't left my adolescence as far as dragons are concerned. That's just how it is.

Because of that, Ai would overtake me in the blink of an eye, continuing on to a far away place.

The thought of that scared me, it was painful. Therefore, I kept her away.

I wholeheartedly pretended not to notice that she longed for me.

What, I wanted her to be happy?

It was just me running away.

Ai understood that we were so different, yet still chose to be with me... to the point of freezing herself.

“... I don't want that.”

My true feelings tumbled out.

But her magic was strong, strong enough that perhaps only she herself could undo it.

In that case, this magic would never be undone.

... No.

There is a way, just one.

Just like how Ken called out to me and summoned my flames, I just need to call out to Ai and use her magic.

“... Ai.”

The way I had been speaking to call out to all of the various objects followed an incantation theory I came up with.

Nevertheless, I completely ignored that method and the first thing to come from my mouth was her name. I racked my brain trying to think of how I should continue.

“If... if us being together forever means you being frozen, I don’t want that.”

Not stopping, I continued to speak like an unreasonable child.

“That fish I ate with you... was terribly delicious.”

Unable to think of a good incantation, I was instead only able to recall our memories together.

“I truly enjoyed living together in the same house as you and Nina... though bathing together was embarrassing.”

Oh, so that was it?

I suddenly realized it.

“It’s all thanks to you that everyone is able to live so prosperously now. You, who’s been with me this whole time.”

Up till now, I didn’t understand what magic was at all.

“Tomorrow, next week, next year, even beyond that.”

Why is it that magic gets stronger as the incantation grows larger?

“Forever and ever... I’ll always want to see your smile.”

It’s because you’re filling it with your thoughts, your heart.

“Please, come out. Ai.”

I embraced the ice pillar.

“I—love you.”

At that moment.

The ice pillar suddenly lost its hardness and crashed down as water.



“I love you, too—”

Her voice trembling, Ai looked at me with teary eyes.

“I love you, Mentor.”

“Ai!”

Enduring the impulse to hug her as tightly as I could, I gently placed my claws on her shoulders.

With that, she jumped toward me and hugged my head tightly, kissing me on my brow.

Her soft touch and gentle scent tickled my nostrils.

“Congratulations, Brother!”

The heavenly joy I felt quickly drowned out Darg’s voice.

Which reminds me.

I’d lost myself and forgot about them, but Darg, Nina, Ken, and Guy-san had all watched that.

Rather, the sun had risen and many of the villagers were gathering around us.

“Maaan, I thought they’d get together at some point, guess it finally happened.”

“Now I can, be, relieved.”

“Really, I thought it’d take a few more years.”

“But Mentor did his best yeah?”

“For him to say *I love you* in front of so many people...”

“Even so, it’s a good thing.”

“Yeah, but too bad for Nina.”

“Hey now, I’ll comfort her.”

“Nina’s too flat, I’ll pass.”

“She *will* punch you, you know.”

The villagers cheered and jeered amongst themselves.

It was at this moment that I was glad at being born a red dragon.

It's not like my face could get any more red, after all.

Interlude: A Moon Hidden Behind Clouds

A cloudless night with a full moon.

And if possible, a with a gentle autumn breeze.

It was fortunate that the best conditions for moonweaving were met ten days before the ceremony.

The moonlight fell upon the fingertips of my right hand, continuing on to twine around the spindle I'd fashioned out of a tree's branch.

I disliked how formal and stiff the etiquette I learned back in my hometown was, but this part was something I liked.

Turning into thread, the moonlight shone like a star within the darkness, strengthening each time I wound it around the spindle.

The fogginess in my mind cleared up bit by bit as I continued focusing on its glittering.

I don't think it's a bad thing to lose yourself in the moment.

But even so...

"Are you going to come out?"

When I looked over to the cause of that fogginess, he walked out from behind the tree he'd been trying to hide behind.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to distract you..."

Not noticing him would have been hard.

Covered with red scales, he was big enough to look like he could eat me in a single bite. There's no way that his gaudiness would be able to hide behind a tree like that.

"Woah, that's... you're turning moonlight into thread?"

“Mm, yeah.”

Responding slightly apathetically, I didn’t stop moving my hands round and round.

“The materialization of energy... so that’s possible too? I’ve heard of traditions where exposing thread to moonlight would impart a mystical power to it, but for moonlight itself to become the thread...”

As usual, he muttered something unintelligible and was impressed by something I didn’t understand much at all.

“Nina, could it be that you made your clothes from that thread, too?”

“Obviously not. I wove them from the wind.”

“The wind...”

There’s no way moonthread could be used for everyday clothing. He wore a strange expression when I responded to his question with common sense.

“Could I watch you weave it?”

“Pass.”

It wouldn’t be as bad if he wanted to see me do the spinning part, but weaving it takes a lot of concentration.

Just imagining him stare at me while weaving makes me feel tired.

“Could it be that you’re supposed to be alone when you perform the weaving?”

“What sort of custom’s that? I just hate being distracted.”

This guy says strange things a lot.

Are all dragons like him? I can’t tell if it’s just him being weird

since I haven't met any other dragons...

"Really? That's great. I would've been really embarrassed if you said I shouldn't be here."

Yeah no, he has to be super weird even among dragons.

I mean come on. This weird guy says so many strange things.

"The thread ripped..."

"Eh, w-was that my fault?"

Of course it was. I scowled at him.

Moonthread is thin and fragile, it'll break immediately if you stop concentrating on it.

"What will you do?"

"There's nothing that can be done, it's too short to make into clothing."

Separate strands of moonthread can't be strung together, so I'll just have to start over. When I'd unfastened the half-spindle of thread, the dragon stared at it intently.

"Such a waste, it's so beautiful."

He's saying something like that as nonchalantly as ever. He probably doesn't even know the meaning behind what he said there.

He may know a lot of words, but I don't think he really understands their nuances.

"I'll give you it if you want."

"Even if you did, my paws wouldn't be able to... oh, right."

The dragon suddenly realized something as he looked at the thread.

“Could I ask for a favor?”

“Be it when you’re healthy, sick, happy, or sad, do you swear to cherish, honor, comfort, and support him to the best of your abilities?”

I turned to Ai and recited the words he’d taught me.

No matter how I look at it, I can’t believe that he’d thought up such a refined phrase by himself.

“I swear.”

Her voice serene, Ai responded as such. Her face couldn’t be seen as it was covered by mooncloth.

His request was for me to weave that short thread into a cloth that could cover her face.

He said it’s called a veil, but I don’t get what that means exactly.

“Then—seal your vow with a kiss.”

He asked for *a* favor, but it ended up with me being the one performing the rites.

Doing as I said, he gently lifted Ai’s veil up.



At that moment, I understood the meaning behind the cloth.

Hidden behind that cloth, Ai's face was so beautiful that I was taken aback.

Even though what was hiding her face was a cloth made from the

moon's light, appearing from behind that veil, her face much, much, much more beautiful than even the moon itself appearing from behind the clouds.

With her cheeks blushing pink, her eyes were clouded with tears. Her smile was lax, like her elation had truly brought her above the clouds.

Her beauty was enough to make me think that she was definitely the most beautiful in the world.

And he, looking at her, was by far the most gentle.

I've been thinking that it would be great if they hurried up and did this, believing it to be something that had to happen... but now that it has, why won't my heart stop stirring?

Ai reached out to his face, bringing it closer to hers until they touched nose-to-nose.

"Here, I declare that a new couple is born."

Somehow, I managed to say it. Cheers and applause giving their blessings poured out from everyone.

I feel happy. I'm glad, even. But why... why can't I catch my breath? Why is there a pit in my chest?

Is there a name for this feeling, too?

He'd probably know one.

But seeing Ai smile like a flower blooming in the spring, I felt that I should wait a long time before asking that walking dictionary of a dragon about it.

Chapter 22: An Uneven Clock



“Compared to me, your life is like the second hand of a clock.”

“Mentor, are you the hour hand then?”

“No... I’m the clock itself.”

It was a rainy autumn day.

We were on a small hill, sparsely populated by small trees.

“You were mighty, wise, and brave.”

Our voices overlapped as we slowly recited the incantation.

“You were sometimes tough, sometimes gentle, and forever heroic.”

There, dozens of people had gathered. Ahead of them all, I prayed.

“Please, I pray you rest in peace.”

—It was Guy-san’s last rites.

His body was gently laid down into the hole we’d dug open in the

hill.

The various villagers had mournfully thrown flowers into the hole to lay with him.

It wasn't that I'd told them to do so.

The villagers, with their own simplistic sensibilities, had established their customs as a matter of course.

"... Mentor."

"Yeah."

Ai calling my name with tears in her eyes, I nodded.

Then, I inhaled deeply—and breathed out toward Guy-san.

Even without using an incantation, it was a dragon flame at high enough of a temperature to deal with an armored bear.

Breathing that out into the hole, not even his bones remained.

"Soil, take this person into yourself."

When Nina solemnly uttered the incantation, his ashes were buried within the ground.

"And sprout anew."

A very small sprout burst from the soil, growing rapidly. Before long, it had grown to be around the size of the surrounding trees.

I'd decided on cremation as a means of warding away the possibility of infectious diseases, but it was surprisingly accepted by everyone readily. I don't think their reason is just that they trust in my flame though, I believe it's also because of the magic Nina just invoked.

"Mentor."

Staring at that small tree, Ai once again called my name.

“Is there really a world after death?”

No, though I don’t think I should answer like that.

Jack Frost’s materialization was most likely due to my lie becoming reality through Ai. As a result of her calling out for Jack Frost day in and day out, her thoughts and emotions accumulated, turned into a significant mass... and eventually became spirit.

An afterworld may be made through a similar way.

“Yes, yes there is.”

Therefore, I answered so.

“There is a world after death, really. So it’s alright, Guy-san is spending his time there in peace.”

* * *

At a location several minutes of flying north from the village we live in.

It may just be a few minutes, but on a dragon’s wings, that means twenty or thirty kilometers.

My birthplace was there. This was the first time I’d returned to it in many years, my birthplace located in a cave nearby a caldera.

It’s a cave, but it’s not a naturally formed one.

There weren’t any stalactites or stalagmites to be seen and the pathway was a beautifully straight circle.

I used to wonder how this cave was build, but now I know. She’d melted it with her breath.

Just like how I’d opened up that mountain’s ventilation hole.

Once I got to the end of the pathway, I reached a large, spacious room. Immediately next to me was a simmering pool of magma, the temperature here was probably too high for normal humans to

withstand. I couldn't even bring Ai here to inform her of our marriage... Well, I didn't tell her either way. If I told her something like *I married a human*, she might doubt my sanity...

"Oh? Welcome home."

"I'm back, mother."

What appeared to be a giant red wall at first glance was actually my current life's mother.

A single one of her outstretched wings were even larger than my entire body.

"I was just about to eat, would you like to join?"

Mother thrust the leg of some giant creature into the magma—it looked weirdly similar to dipping a fry into a dipping cup.

"Time to eat, then."

Following her example, I put the meat into the magma before eating it as well. This is how I always used to eat my meals when I lived here.

"Yeah, tasty."

I don't think that anything other than red dragons would find it tasty at all though.

I've heard that the sense of saltiness in taste is just a feeling of heat and pain on the tongue.

I can't say for sure if it's the same for dragons, but putting magma directly on a red dragon's tongue is definitely painfully hot. It gives us a tingling sensation.

For dragons, magma is salty.

However.

Chewing on meat side by side with her, I got a hold of myself.

Even though this is my first time coming back in quite a few years, she's been acting normally.

I was troubled by whether this was because dragons were patient by nature or if it was because mother was especially leisurely.

"Mother. Could I ask you a question?"

"What is it?"

Mother leaned her giant head down until we were only around my tail's length apart.

"Mother, how old are you?"

"Twenty-six!"

I had to stop myself from spouting back at her to not hide her age.

"How could that be? Right now, I'm around twenty."

"Twenty? ... Ooh. You're counting by the seasons?"

Mother closed her mouth most of the way and blew out a thin, long flame against the ground. Easily melting the hard rocks, she drew a detailed picture on the ground. Be it in heat or control, she exceeded me by far.

"This is the sun shining in the sky. And *this* is the planet we live on."

The picture was of our planet revolving around the sun in an elliptical orbit.

"Once the cycle of morning and night repeats four hundred and twenty times, this planet returns to more or less the same position. However, the orbit isn't fully complete there, the ellipse itself moves little by little."

Like a petal, the ellipse revolved around the sun as it spun.

“So then, after ninety-eight times, it will return to roughly the original orbit. That is one year.”

My mouth fell open in my surprise.

Let alone Copernican theory and her understanding of the concept of orbital trajectories, I was shocked by the fact that she was nearly twenty-six hundred years old. No, since the revolution cycles themselves are longer than Earth’s, she’s over twenty-eight hundred in Earth’s years.

From her perspective, she would probably view the fragile, weak humans incapable of their own language and that relied on stone tools as no better than ants. Once again, I was stunned by the vast chasm between humans and dragons.

“... Mother, so far as you know... who’s the oldest dragon?”

“Let me see, I think your grandfather was more than two hundred?”

Two hundred... times ninety-eight.

Even in this world’s year length, that’s nineteen thousand, six hundred years old. Isn’t that basically immortal?

“... You gave birth to me pretty young, mother.”

That’s all I could manage to say.

* * *

“Welcome home, Mentor!”

Ai ran up to me when I returned to the village.

“I’m back. Sorry, you must have been lonely.”

“No, I’m okay.”

Ai hugged my foreleg tightly, laughing with a smile on her face.

Could I continue living for hundreds, thousands of years after

losing her?

No. I'd never make it.

But I also know that I don't have the courage to end my life with hers.

In that case, there's only one thing I can do.

Eternal youth.

I have no choice but to realize mankind's dream in this world.

Chapter 23: A Red Dragon's Blood

Cutting your finger when you're cooking happens often enough, but I'd prefer not having to cut my finger in order to cook, if possible.

Darg held his crag blade aloft as he slowly sidled up to me.

Raising my left foreleg up as a shield, I breathed out.

“Huuu!”

Just as I did a quick exhalation, he swung his sword down.

I felt no pain from it at all.

“A-are you alright, Brother!?”

“Yeah. That was splendid.”

Ripping off one of my scales from where he struck me, I could see blood start to flow out and was glad.

Honestly, it looked like Darg was the one in pain, given his expression as he rushed over to me.

Be it the west's time-honored legends or the east's, they all point to a dragon's blood being a panacea, an all-purpose medicine.

In the German epic poem [The Song of Nibelungens], a hero named Siegfried acquired an immortal body after bathing in the blood of a dragon that went by the name Fafnir. In China, it's said that a clot of dragon or qilin blood is a traditional medicine so often that one may think they take it for the truth.

Which is why I suspected that my blood might also have its uses.

“Uhh, well then, I'll just...”

“No, wait a moment. Nina, a rabbit, if you would.”

“Nn.”

Stopping Ai from starting to lick from my wound with her tongue, I spoke to Nina. Following her nod, the forest suddenly began rustling and a rabbit popped out from it.

It's like the forest is one large vending machine to her.

“We can't have you just suddenly try it, Ai.”

Placing the rabbit's mouth against my leg, I forced it to drink the blood.

The effect was both instant and immense.

“Pi——!”

Letting out a cry, smoke blew out from various parts of the rabbit's body.

Meanwhile, the rabbit started struggling wildly and managed to escape my grasp. Two or three leaps later, its white pelt caught on fire, causing it to writhe on the ground. Before long, it stopped moving at all.

Despite that entirely unexpected event leading to an awkward silence, Nina suddenly lifted the rabbit by one of its legs and bit into it.

“!! ... Delicious...!”

Her eyes opened wide.

“It was cooked all at once from the inside, so its juices are completely sealed in...! And it's still just hot enough. Even its skin is crunchy, there's no need to deal with it at all!”

“A failure...”

We managed to accidentally find a great way to cook rabbits, but there's no way that would be good for Ai. So this didn't work either, huh...?

“I’ll use today’s magic on you then.”

“Okay.”

Motioning for Ai to come over, I put my paw on her head.

“That which crawls through the dark, which walks the world’s abyss, which exterminates breath and seeks to hide all radiance, which swoops from the skies, the world’s edge, life’s final destination. The owner of many names, the flow of time, death itself. Remove yourself from this person, vanish!”

It was the incantation for life prolonging magic I’d been using while groping around for a solution.

We’d confirmed that it was safe to use, but unfortunately, we aren’t sure on its true effectiveness either. I’d tested it out on insects and other small animals with a very short lifespan, but I didn’t see much of a result. If there was one effect, it would be that it eased their passing.

—I want to extend her longevity and be together forever.

Ai didn’t seem worried about accepting my unilateral selfishness, though.

Panicking somewhat, I explained the disadvantages and other concerns of having a long lifespan.

Getting tired of living, seeing your loved ones die off one by one, as well as being unable to die even if you wanted to if the method used wouldn’t allow it.

[So Mentor, that means you’ll have to go through all those terrible things, too?]

Out of all my prepared responses, that one line ended the discussion.

But even though I’ve gotten her permission to do these things, I haven’t had any breakthroughs in the least.

Setting aside the standard ways to live a longer life, I've also tried various other methods, but they've all lead to having no effect. Even this dragon blood method wound up being unusable, despite me putting so many expectations into it.

"That didn't go very well, did it."

It was Nina, she was still gobbling up the rabbit and licking the meat juices that had streamed down her fingers.

She eats a disproportionately large amount compared to her slender figure. I wonder what's going on with her metabolism?

"Come to think of it, Nina, how old are you?"

Her appearance basically hadn't changed at all since the time we met.

She still looked to be in her mid-teens.

It's not much of a problem since her beauty was already completely there, but is she growing?

"Hm? Let's see... I can't remember exactly, but around a hundred thirty I guess?"

No way, she's my senior?

I died at the age of eighty-nine, so she's my senior even after including those years.

"Nina-san, you're that old?"

"Longears live a looong time, seriously."

Having not known her age either, Ai and Darg's eyes were both opened wide.

"... Just to be sure, is there a secret for longevity or anything?"

"Maybe, I don't know though."

Ah-ha!

Even if it's just a sliver of a chance, I can't let this go.

"I'd like to ask another elf about it. Nina, do you know where any are?"

As soon as I asked that, a shadow was cast over Nina's face.

"... I don't know. It's been a really long time since I, umm, left the forest, so..."

She always spoke straightforwardly, but right then, she was strangely inarticulate.

"Brother, if it's about where longears live, I know a place."

Just then, Darg raised his hand.

Oh right, he was able to speak in Elvish.

Which means he'd naturally had to have met an elf.

"Could you lead me there?"

"Yeah, sure. It's not too far. Around half a day's walk."

"We should be able to make it there and back today if you get on my back, then."

Darg was even heavier than he looked. I had to put up with it though, things like this require sacrifices.

"Wait."

Nina stopped us as we were about to head off.

"... I'm going too."

She looked like she was worried about something as she said that.

"Right over there. I met the longears in that forest."

We were further out than the village Darg and the others used to all live in.

The slow flight took around an hour in all.

“... Brother, are you alright?”

“Y-yeah, maybe...”

Breathing heavily, I answered Darg’s question.

“Sorry, maybe I should have stayed behind after all?”

“No... it’s okay. It’s not your fault, Ai.”

In the end, Nina insisted on coming along with Darg, so then Ai decided she wanted to come as well. Leaving the village’s management to Ken and my other pupils during our time away, the four of us set off for the elven village.

However, it would’ve been a decently long distance to walk.

So then I wondered if we could all fly there by using magic.

Thinking that was definitely a mistake.

Darg on my back and Ai held with my arms, Nina was holding on to the tip of my tail.

I was thinking along the lines of: *couldn’t Ai and Nina fly even in those weird postures since they can use flight magic?* In a sense, I was right. In another, I was wrong.

Honestly, I feel lighter than usual thanks to Ai’s cooperation.

The problem was our positioning.

Feeling Ai’s soft body wrapped in my arms, I wondered about whether she was really the same kind of living thing as Darg.

Even more important than those wicked thoughts, I was afraid that I might exert too much force and accidentally crush her, so I haven’t been able to feel at ease this entire past hour.

“Nina, were you alright like that?”

“Nn. Good.”

Nina nodded, only responding in a bare minimum when I turned around to ask her after landing.

I was worried since I couldn't keep an eye on her on the way here, but it seems like she was alright.

She looked a little pale, but it's probably not due to the flight.

“Nina. You can wait here if you don't want to go in.”

When I said as such, she shook her head in silence.

“Sis says she's good so she's good. Let's go, Brother.”

“Yeah...”

Feeling a little uneasy about her lack of a response, I consented and headed to the forest's entrance with Darg.

The moment I took a single step, I felt the sensation of the hairs on my neck raise on end.

I don't exactly have hair though, so maybe I should say I felt my scales raise on end...?

“... We're being watched.”

Ai leaned close to me and whispered in a low voice.

She probably felt the same thing as me.

[Hey, Longears! Get out here!]

Meanwhile, either Darg hadn't noticed them or all or did notice and didn't care. He just gave a nearby tree a kick and shouted out in Elvish.

[As noisy as ever, Bearmonkey.]

The one who had appeared without making a sound was an incredible beauty.

From the looks of it, she was around a hundred and seventy centimeters tall.

With her tall stature, her limbs were slender. Her visage held frighteningly well-ordered features.

Not face, visage. I want my impression of her to be understood, so I'm saying it like that.

Although Nina's also a considerable beauty, her beauty is still childlike in a way.

Though given her lack of a chest, I can't even be sure of her sex in the first place. But either way, this elf here... she's beyond beautiful.

[What a strange assembly you have there. Bearmonkey, a Lizard, and a Kidmonkey. As well as... aah. Dropout, huh?]

The elf raised her eyebrow exaggeratedly.

[Dropout?]

I responded with a question, parroting her word in spite of myself.

Bearmonkey has to be Darg. He's simply too fitting for it, there's no sense of incompatibility between that term and him at all.

Lizard is naturally referring to me. I'd never think otherwise, seeing as how I've been called that so many times up till now.

As for Kidmonkey, that would be Ai. That honestly irritated me, but I endured it.

In that case, I know who dropout was meant for through process of elimination.

[... Long time no see, Ultramarine.]

Our genius is, unexpectedly... a Dropout?

Chapter 24: The Elven Princess

Those beings are exquisitely elegant and do not grow old, shining ever brighter as the years elapse. As for a certain princess of theirs... hah.

“Are you complaining?”

[What are you doing, returning here so shamelessly?]

[There’s a question I want to ask.]

Nina responded to the elf she called Ultramarine—who’d reacted with an expression that looked like she was flaring up—with an almost uninterested tone, as though she didn’t mind the comment.

[I figured that since you call me Dropout, you’d obviously know the answer.]

[Hmph. Obviously. There’s nothing I don’t know.]

Ultramarine thrust her chest out haughtily.

[What is the reason we live so much longer than rabbits, deers, and these ones?]

Nina glanced at Ai and Darg as she gave her question.

[Hah.]

Ultramarine laughed derisively.

[... Why should I bother teaching you about that?]

With that, she diverted her eyes. A drop of sweat slid down her face.



Yeah, she doesn't know.

“Doesn't look like she knows...”

“Doesn't know...”

Entirely similar to my thoughts, Ai and Darg muttered at the same time in a low voice.

[Well, looks like you don't know either then.]

[I do know! I know, I just don't feel like telling you is all!]

[So this girl is Ultramarine. She's a bit of an idiot, but she's not too bad, she did greet us.]

[Who's an idiot!?!]

Nina turned her back to the girl and spoke to us, ignoring Ultramarine's clamor.

"I know the way inside, let's go."

[Hey, what did you just say!?!]

Ultramarine ran over to Nina, who'd started walking at a brisk pace.

[Listen to someone when they're speaking! You're not about to try going to Eldest, right? He isn't a person someone like you can just go and see! Hey! Are you listening to me!?!]

Ultramarine continued trying to stop Nina, but she ignored her.

[... Huh? Can she really not hear me? Heeeey! ... Maybe she can't see me either? A-am I invisible?]

Misunderstanding something due to Nina entirely ignoring her, Ultramarine started dancing about in a way that looked comical. Almost pitiful, actually.

Even so, despite not seeing anyone else, I felt people looking at us. It appears that there are quite a number of elves living in this forest.

I'd thought that elves lived solitary lives, but it looks like Nina was the exception.

Nina continued walking while ignoring the yapping Ultramarine. Before long, we saw a huge tree.

The biggest trees on Earth were baobab trees, around ten or so meters in diameter if I recall. But this tree here, its diameter was easily beyond a hundred meters. I can't even begin to guess how tall it is.

Fruits growing in clusters along its branches, there was a large cavity opened up in the middle of its trunk. A broad stairway led into the cavity, making it look very much like a temple.

It was a wonderful tree. If I had to express my feelings about it, it was like a fusion of an orchard and a dwelling. I wonder how many people could live comfortably in just one of them. It'd probably take a considerable amount of time to grow, but I wonder if I could get them to give me a seedling?

Showing no hesitation, Nina went up the stairs as I thought about that.

[Come on, stop! Bearmonkey, stop Dropout!]

Ultramarine shouted that out, appearing as though she had no intention to continue and enter the tree herself. Her voice continued to call out from behind us as we stepped into the large tree.

"This... is amazing."

Looking around, I was amazed.

The tree's cavity was filled with light coming down from the sky. The wood's thoroughly polished white surface reflected the sunlight, leading to an even more mystical atmosphere.

Within the abundant light was an elf whose whiskers were as long as he was elderly. Given that his white beard was long enough to cover his entire body, the elf was obviously rather advanced in his age. Nevertheless, his figure betrayed no signs of the standard withering of old age. His body simply held an austere atmosphere, similar to this tree or some sacred mountain.

“I have already heard of your story.”

Hearing the elf who appeared to be referred to as Eldest speak, I opened my eyes wide.

Because he was speaking in Japanese.

“You can speak our language?”

“Plants exist anywhere and everywhere, oh dragon child.”

Is he saying that so long as there are plants, he can monitor the area?

I’d honestly like to take it as a bluff, but at the very least it appears that he understands what we have been doing to some extent.

“To get to the point—I know several paths that could be taken to reach the life extension you desire.”

“Really!?”

Hearing him speak without beating around the bush, I practically jumped into the air.

“Please, please tell me! I’ll do anything!”

“There is no need for that. I am already in your debt.”

“In my... debt?”

Hearing something I couldn’t understand at all, I tilted my head.

I’ve burnt the forest with a beam before, but I don’t remember doing anything that would cause the elves to be thankful.

“After saving our princess, you even returned her to us.”

All of our gazes immediately turning over to Nina, her expression changed to look more uncomfortable.

“Nina, you were a princess?”

“... Kind of.”

Nina nodded with an unpleasant expression.

It seemed to be a topic she didn't really want to talk about.

“Allow him to guide you.”

When the Eldest suddenly raised his hand, another elf came to lead us away.

I started to follow him, but I turned around.

Because Nina hadn't moved with us.

“Nina?”

“This—this is where we part.”



“Why!?”

“Remember? I’d ran away.”

The Eldest said that he was in my debt for *returning* her... oh my.

Did she come back here so that my wish could come true?

That calmness she had, composed to the point of looking pale, was that because she didn't want to do this?

"Don't look at me like that. It's not like we'll never see each other again."

Guessing my thoughts, Nina spoke.

But, contrary to her words, she appeared to be in some kind of pain.

"But Nina—"

"Hurry up and go, leave!"

Shouting out with a voice that sounded more like a cry, I flinched.

Had she ever raised her voice like that in all the time I've known her?

"Goodbye. The past ten years I spent with you... I was happy."

She followed up with that and a smile.

It was a smile fragile, though, like someone laughing despite being in pain.

[This way.]

Before I could say anything, the guiding elf urged us forward in a tone that seemed to leave no space for denial.

Nina waving her small hand to our backs, we left the large tree's den.

As soon as we left the cave, I saw someone staring at us with a hatred. It was Ultramarine.

She looked like she wanted to say something to me, glaring at me intently.

But she instead took off into the grove, not saying anything to me in the end.

“Mentor... was that really alright? Leaving Nina-san?”

I wasn’t able to answer Ai’s question.

She was a princess, so she also probably had a role to fill in this community.

If she didn’t accomplish that role, the elven settlement itself might be troubled.

If that doesn’t match up with what she herself wants... I don’t know which side I should back.

[Please wait here. I will prepare the medicine.]

As soon as the guiding elf arrived at a tree that was similar to the one before, he had us wait outside as he went inside. It was similar, but this tree was quite small compared to the Eldest’s. Even so, it was still a large tree at around ten meters in diameter. It seemed that elves liked to open caverns in still-living trees to live in.

[It’s complete. Please swallow this.]

A while later, the elf came out of the tree with a wooden bowl.

There was a powdery medicine inside the bowl.

It looked like several different things were ground up in a mortar to make it.

It was ground into fine grains, but there were a few colors mixed together in it.

[What was this made from?]

[Desert spider tail, the root of a white spring flower, clubfish liver, as well as several varieties of mushroom.]

That wasn’t all I wanted to ask.

I wanted to ask if there were any side effects, but I didn't know the Elvish word for it. Besides, I was also just a little hesitant in asking the maker himself if it had any ill effects.

"I'll take it, then."

Putting her mouth to the bowl, Ai tilted her head back.

Immediately before the powder reached her lips, I knocked it out of her hands.

[What's wrong?]

"Mentor?"

Both elf and Ai were surprised by my sudden behavior.

[That clubfish, was it something like this?]

I picked up a tree branch and drew a picture of it on the ground. I'd thought of something right before Ai started to take the medicine.

No, rather than thought of something, maybe I should say I remembered something?

[You know of it?]

The fish definitely did look like a club.

Before it inflated.

[This medicine, does it only extend longevity? Are there any other effects?]

[There are. In addition to extending one's life span, the one who drinks it will also become quiet and obedient.]

The elf answered as if it was natural.

So that was it after all. I knew the name of this medicine.

It didn't have the life prolongation effect on Earth, but its name

made me recall it.

The medicine's name... was Zombie Powder.

Chapter 25: Misunderstanding

*That man was always half right, half wrong.
That's twice as bad as being entirely wrong.*

Zombie Powder.

It was a drug used by those who put their faith into what was called Voodoo back on Earth.

Made with a combination of several toxins, it was a drug that could induce a dead-like state in humans if enough was ingested due to the Fugu's tetrodotoxin within it. I'd owned some myself in my previous life. I didn't actually use it though, of course.

On Earth, it was simply just a poison. Depending on the amount used, it truly could induce a state similar to death, luckily—no, perhaps unluckily? That same process would lead to one's frontal lobe being destroyed, resulting in a zombie-like state. That was all.

[In other words, it prolongs one's life by breathing the tree of life into a body that's reached a dead-like state, is that it?]

[... Probably so.]

Once I'd compiled the information I got from the elf that had guided us, that's what it seemed to be.

[Is it impossible to breath the tree of life into someone who hasn't taken this medicine?]

[Without first taking the medicine, it is not possible.]

It had likely already been tried.

[So to put it simply, it destroys one's foundation of life... what we call the soul?]

The elf stared at me in puzzlement as I said that.

According to what he said, not even he understood the theory or principles behind it. He just comprehended that that was what worked through sheer experience.

[Soul? Livestock have souls?]

It wasn't contempt, but genuine doubt.

As elves themselves were long-lived, they had no reason to use Zombie Powder on themselves.

It appeared to be something meant for use on goats or cows—livestock.

And although they weren't actually livestock, humans were in the same category as far as the elves were concerned.

It could be thought of as cruel treatment, but it wasn't too great of a difference compared to what the humans on Earth did.

Even favorite pets like dogs or cats that humans treated practically the same as other humans would be sterilized through surgery. Neutered males were said to gain a more calm personality, while spayed females would go out of their way to avoid the act of conception. Having the surgery done was even considered a natural thing to do since the culture around it said that it would cause the owners to be even more so the target of the pet's affections.

From human society's point of view, it was a justifiable reason. The animals themselves may have had a different opinion on the matter, though.

And in this world, the person I love is on the animal side.

[Thank you. I will try asking Eldest-san for another method.]

He said that he knew of several methods.

In other words, this shouldn't be the only one.

And besides, I concerned about Nina.

Bidding farewell to the elf that led us here, we decided to return to Eldest's cave.

Walking through the forest, I suddenly heard something.

It sounded like two hard things hitting each other. However, I couldn't imagine hearing something like that in a forest where there's nothing but trees, leaves, and grass.

Continuing to advance after thinking I'd imagined it, I heard the noise even louder than before.

I looked around to see where it came from since it sounded like it was close, but I couldn't find it.

"Mentor, is something wrong?"

"No, but have you heard any strange noises?"

"Strange noises...? Not really."

Ai looked confused after seeing me, but neither she nor Darg seemed to hear it.

A fist-sized rock struck against my titled head, making a sound.

[Ah, whoops.]

When I looked towards where the rock came from, I saw Ultramarine looking at me with an expression that seemed to say, "I've done it now..."

So that's what was making the noise?

[Y-you finally noticed, lizard!?!]

It seems like she'd been trying to catch my attention by throwing stones at me. My scales were too hard, though, so I didn't feel anything from the small pebble. Not even that larger rock from a moment ago made me feel any pain, I only felt that I'd been hit by something.

[—san!]

When I turned to glance at Ultramarine, she added the honorific in a panic.

[What is it?]

[Are you all trying to go to Eldest's place?]

Now that she mentions it, she was trying to keep us from going there last time.

Is she planning on forcing us to stop now that Nina's not with us?

[That's our intention, can we not?]

Raising my head up and looking at her, I looked at her with a simple threat.

It was the kind of stance I took back then with Darg.

It was obvious that I'd managed to frighten her more than intended.

[Are you going... to save Dropout?]

But despite her trembling, Ultramarine asked me something unexpected.

[Save her? Is Nina in a situation she needs saving from?]

[Idiot! Who would use someone's name as sprightly as that!? Call her Dropout!]

Ultramarine criticized me with an angry look.

She didn't say it with contempt or disdain, it was more like anxiety and concern.

[What do you mean by *dropout*?]

I had regarded the term as something to use in derision, but judging by Ultramarine's attitude, it doesn't seem to have that

meaning.

[What do you mean what does it mean? It's as I said.]

Ultramarine frowned, puzzled.

[The one whose flowers *drop* and whose leaves fall *out*. The princess' task is to be us forest people's cornerstone.]

It was just as I began to think that I had no idea what she meant...

[If you don't do something, she'll be turned into a tree.]

[... What!?!]

What crossed my mind in that instant was the method of prolonging life by breathing in the tree of life. And then that huge tree.

[No way, that tree the Eldest lives in...]

[Yeah. It's become very old, so they have to change it soon.]

No way, were all of the house-trees they lived in here previously elves?

By the time I realized what I was doing, I was already running to the giant tree the Eldest lived in.

"Eldest!"

"You came to ask about another life prolongation method... at least you had, at first."

The conversation from a moment ago would be known to Eldest due to the surrounding forest trees. It appeared that Ultramarine throwing those stones at me was originally in an attempt to induce me out of the forest. It's unfortunate, but that didn't go well.

"Please return Nina."

"Speak of something else. The princess is not yours."

It was a sound argument, but I couldn't back down.

"She is someone important to me, I don't want her to become a tree."

"She's important to us as well, it goes without saying. Still, it is necessary so that our clan may continue."

I'll just destroy it then—is something I very much couldn't say.

Sacrificing a piece for the whole is not wrong as a survival strategy.

It just so happened that that piece was my friend.

I couldn't destroy them for the sake of my own ego.

"In that case... I'll protect you."

However.

I couldn't fail Nina anymore.

"I'll defend you all, help me cooperate with you. There must be some other way than sacrificing Nina."

Eldest drew his brows together in regret.

"I am thankful for your feelings, oh dragon child. But that is not possible. Be it as it may that you are a fire dragon, you are still too young. With your small body, you couldn't be even a century old. Far from defending us, you likely wouldn't even be able to defeat us."

Understandable.

I didn't want to admit it, though.

"Well then, this will be easy."

The one to break into our conversation was Darg.

"How about you and us have a fight?"

“Mortal, it is surprising enough you could learn how to speak. Let alone the dragon, you wouldn’t even make it a fight for us.”

He was neither mocking him nor was he being careless.

Sure, there were no humans that could fight an elf.

“Try me.”

Darg laughed fearlessly, his fist held up. He didn’t even wield his crag blade.

[... This one is the company of the dragon we owe. Do not kill him.]

An elf stepped forward when Eldest said that.

At the same time, countless tree roots spawned from the ground and tied themselves around Darg’s limbs.

Elves were all natural-born magi. Humans weren’t a match for them.

—However, that was only if the human wasn’t a magus.

“You’re someone we’re talking about protecting. I won’t kill you.”

Darg threw the words back. He tore off the roots that bound him and sunk his fist into the elf’s stomach, moving almost fast enough to make my eyes lose him.

“Now then, who’s next?”

Darg smiled wildly, like a tiger.

Chapter 26: Duel

“Hey you, let’s take this outside.”

“Unnecessary, we’re already outside.”

*Our surroundings turning into an empty lot as he spoke,
I realized that I’d made a mistake in picking a fight against him.*

“... Sure then, why not. If that’s what you want, I will admit that you all are strong enough if you can defeat my three elites. This place is too confined, though.”

Saying that, Eldest led the three of us outside.

Swinging his hand after we moved outside, the surrounding trees began to rustle, moving away as though they had minds of their own and quickly left behind an open area. He manipulated the trees even more skillfully than Nina and didn’t even need an incantation to do it.

[Are you sure you want to move your weapons so far away?]

[It won’t be a problem. Evergreen, go play with him.]

[Yo, Pipsqueak. You’re planning on going against me head on with a body like that?]

He was small compared to Darg’s more than two meter tall muscular body.

[Do you know why Eldest said that it wouldn’t be a problem, despite moving the trees away?]

[Because it won’t change how you’re about to lose?]

Darg responded to the elf’s question in jest.

[Nah—]

With a sound similar to crackling bones, Evergreen’s physique swelled up.

A number of muscles on his arms turned into thick, reddish-brown branches. Scale-like bark covered his body as it turned into a thick trunk.

[—it’s because we ourselves are the forest, *Pipsqueak*.]

He was around ten meters tall.

Having turned into a large tree, Evergreen literally looked down on Darg as he shook his leaves.

[Heh.]

Looking up at him, Darg responded noncommittally, seemingly uninterested.

[Try not to die, alright?]

The giant tree’s branch rose, then slammed down on Darg.

Like that, he stood and allowed himself to be crushed.

“Darg-san...!”

Ai called out from my side.

[I wonder...]

However, we heard his usual banter come from beneath the shade of the elf’s leaves.

[This tree’s your body, yeah? If I wrecked it, would you die?]

[Nah. It’s just a temporary vessel. No need to worry about it.]

After answering, a crack began to travel along Evergreen’s body.

[Sounds great.]

Darg spoke as the giant tree continued splitting in half.

[It’d suck if you wound up dying from that.]

[Admirable...!]

Appearing from within the ruined tree, he fell to his knees.

[You still good for more?]

Hearing Darg's question, Evergreen refused with a bitter smile.

[C'mon, who's next? May as well send both of them, doesn't matter to me.]

[Violet. You go next.]

Ignoring Darg, Eldest sent the next opponent forward.

This time, it was a petite elf.

[I will be your opponent.]

The elf named Violet spoke politely, holding her left hand out in front of her.

Following that, her body was covered in thorns in the blink of an eye, further turning into a shield and armor. From her hands grew the stem of a long rose she used to point at Darg with like a sword.

[I see, Violet, eh?]

Understanding, Darg nodded.

Violet roses appeared here and there amongst the thorns that made up her armor.

I thought that Evergreen and Violet were simply unusual names, but now I see that it's referring to the magic they use. It should be the same with Ultramarine, she should have some leaf or flower colored ultramarine.

But assuming that's the case, what about Nina?

Ultramarine called her Dropout... *the one whose flowers drop and whose leaves fall out*, if I recall?

But Nina can't make dead trees move?

Even as I was thinking about that, Darg and Violet's duel had begun.

[Tch...!]

Darg drew back and clicked his tongue. Fresh blood was dripping all along the area from his fist to his chest.

[Harder than it looks, seriously.]

Not even Darg's attack would break the thorn armor that easily.

The thorns pierced his fists when he went to attack with them, so Violet was able to continue flicking away his attacks with her weapon, keeping him at bay.

[It will be dangerous if you continue bleeding. Please, resign.]

Violet pointed her weapon at Darg.

The only kind of magic Darg could use was strengthening magic.

If he were able to summon fire or snowstorms like me and Ai, it would have been easy to win against Violet.

He might not have bled so much if he had his crag blade, at least.

But that wasn't the reason he was driven so far into a corner.

[How sweet of you. Guess I should apologize before this, then.]

Hearing Darg say that dismissively, Violet cocked her head to the side.

"I am quick. I am solid. I—"

It was an amazingly simple incantation.

Darg could only use magic that strengthened him.

That much was certain.

“—am STRONG!”

By by no means did that mean he was weak.

The single attack Darg used wasn't a closed fist, but a fully stretched palm.

Sounding like a truck ran into her, Violet's body—armor and all—got blasted back.

Continuing for a ways, she eventually crashed into a tree trunk at the edge of the of the open area and fell, unmoving.

[She didn't die, right?]

Blood dripping from his palm, Darg grumbled.

[... I... surrender...]

Seeing Violet somehow manage to raise herself back up, Darg clapped his chest in relief.

“Bro would've beat me half to death if I killed a woman.”

Well, looks like Darg's much better at not treating women as objects... I think?

He probably would have won a lot easier if it weren't for his agreement with me.

[Send over the last one. Let's hurry up and get this done with.]

“I'll go.”

Darg quickly paled upon seeing who stepped forward with a cold voice.

The third person was even smaller than the petite Violet.

Hair pinned up and shining gold due to the sun's light making its way through the trees, her eyes were as clear a blue as a sacred spring's water. She looked innocent, but not in a childish way. Her refreshing expression was filled with composure, with dignity.

She had a mysterious beauty, like some mythical goddess. Looking at her, I feel relaxed, my anxiety calming down—like I'd been living with her for decades.

“... Hey. Can I surrender?”

“No.”

To be more precise, it was Nina.

Swords, spears, axes, hammers, scythes.

Various sorts of weapons made from wood lined up before Darg and threw themselves together at him all at once.

“Wait—I said wait! Please wait, Sis!”

Even though Darg was able to avoid the first, break the second, catch the third, deflect the fourth, and endure the fifth, they wooden weapons Nina continued to launch at him were never ending. Having to face that overwhelming assault head on, Darg wasn't able to keep up and was pushed back.

“Ridiculous...”

Saying that, Darg fell to the ground.

I agree with him.

The one who remains after the leaves drop from their branches, after the flowers fall out.

The seed.

In other words, Nina's ability—[Dropout]—was to freely birth and grow plants.

I see, that's definitely a fitting power for one called a princess.

I'm not sure whether she has that power because she's a princess or she's a princess because she has that power, though.

Either way, I can't figure out why she's opposing us.

“I guess I’m misunderstanding something though.”

Nina looked at me with cold eyes and spoke.

“Coming back to this forest, that was *my* decision. Don’t butt in.”

“That’s a lie.”

Unexpectedly, Nina was bad at lying.

She can’t forget where she grew up due to her amazing memory and her uneasy expression is saying that she didn’t return out of actually wanting to. Even I can understand that much.

“You’re pushing yourself for Ai’s sake, aren’t you?”

“... I’m not pushing myself to do anything.”

Responding in a pout, Nina diverted her eyes.

“You don’t care about me. You only ever think about Ai.”

“I do care!”

Nina’s very unusual response upset me, causing me to unintentionally raise my voice.

“That’s not what I mean! You should only care about what’s important—”

“You’re plenty important to me too, Nina!”

Nina’s mouth shut tight, glaring at me like she wanted to say something.

“You—”

Enough. This fight is our win, admit defeat.”

Nina started to speak, but Eldest interrupted her.

“Wait.”

However, Ai spoke up.

“I will fight.”

“... Why...?”

Hearing Nina’s unbelieving mutter, Ai looked at her and smiled.

“Because you are important to me, too.”

“... Is she insane?”

Eldest didn’t ask Ai that, but me.

He wouldn’t even recognize her enough to talk with her directly.

“She—”

I responded.

Among us, Ai was the only non-inborn Magus.

She was a genius when it came to magic.

Darg becoming a Magus was due to his naturally blessed physique.

He was only able to use self-strengthening magic due to his belief in his own strength.

Nina and I were similar to that as well, in a way.

I happened to be born a dragon. She happened to be born an elf.

Therefore, we were strong.

In that sense, Ai was the most talented among all of us here.

Perhaps the most talented was Nina.

Similar to how Darg was born so strong, Nina was a genius even among the elves.

Given that Evergreen and Violet are both obviously older than Nina, seeing as how her appearance hasn't changed in more than ten years, they're at least a century older.

Even so, Nina's stronger than them. No matter what, that could only be called a genius.

Which is exactly the reason why.

"She... is strong."

Ai was the best one suited to showing off the strength of the human race.

"... Give it a try, then."

After closing his eyes for a moment, Eldest accepted it.

Ai and Nina confronted one another quietly.

"I won't go easy on you."

"I know."

Ai nodded in response to Nina's words, then smiled.

"Neither will I."

I get the feeling that there are sparks flying in the air between the two of them.

Huh?

Wasn't Nina fighting for Ai's sake?

"I won't give you the chance to recite anything!"

As soon as Nina shouted that, innumerable trees shot up from the ground and reformed into weapons, the same as earlier.

No, she really isn't holding back, just like she said.

The myriad of weapons she arrayed against Darg only appeared

in front of him, but she's surrounded Ai with them entirely. It was a complete lockdown, impossible to escape.

Ai, lacking the time for a drawn-out incantation, faced the weapons and pointed.

“Appear.”

All that Ai recited was that short statement.

In the next moment, the duel was decided.

“Once again—”

She sounded truly frustrated.

“—you improved, didn't you...”

Everything around them was frozen, their surroundings a world of pure white.

“Hoh, hoh, hoh.”

Jack Frost's voice echoed loudly against the frost.

Chapter 27: Control Magic

Like introducing yourself in a forest.

—A metaphor for avoiding danger passed down through the Scarlet Clan

“Thank you, Jack Frost.”

“Hoh, hoh, hoh.”

The snow spirit faded away laughing once Ai patted its head lightly. Just then, the wooden weapons she’d had frozen in the air clanked down onto the ground.

The ice that covered the ground and trees also melted away.

The strong point of humans was their growth speed.

Not just in body, but in mentality, technology, and magic. It all improved and grew at a frighteningly rapid pace. This, of course, held true for Ai, who was able to control Jack Frost himself.

It had gotten to the level that I’d lose if we fought now and I didn’t take it seriously.

“We should be able to go back together now, right Nina-san?”

Ai looked over to Nina who had sank to the floor, crestfallen.

“... Oh well then. A deal’s a deal.”

Nina sighed in relief and turned away, but she answered clearly.

“No!”

Yet even so, Eldest raised an objection.

“After something so ludicrous... why would I approve!?”

Despite knowing Japanese, he still didn’t understand Darg and Ai’s strength yet.

Us being able to take Nina back after winning the bout was never an established condition.

However, while that may be true, that was something I wouldn't back down on.

“A promise is a promise. I will be taking Nina.”

When I approached the still-sitting Nina to take her hand, Eldest deliberately rose from his seat and stood in front of me.

“This will be the end.”

He scowled at me with a severe look to him, declaring haughtily.

“I will be your opponent.”

What was magic but a collection of meanings? Whether I use the incantation or not, it doesn't change.

In other words, the longer you've been alive, the more you know of, the more it is strengthened.

There was no doubt that Eldest, an elf that had lived for unknown centuries, would be a powerful Magus.

“Although I say that...”

What sort of magic will he use?

Thinking that in vigilance, Eldest quietly held his hand up toward Ai.

“It won't be a fight.”

Just then, Ai's body fell to the ground.

“What did you do to Ai!?”

“Hmph... as expected of a dragon, I suppose. What? Don't be so anxious. I just put her to sleep.”

Saying that, he then held his hand up toward Nina, causing her to

slump to the ground in a similar manner.

What in the world is going on here!?

Finally, he put Darg to sleep, then turned toward me.

I don't get what sort of magic he used at all.

He put them to sleep, so did he spread some gas or pollen with a sleeping effect?

But even those wouldn't be able to cause the three of them to fall asleep that fast, unable to show even the smallest glimmer of resistance.

"You've produced four people, so that means I can fight now."

"That's quite alright, I don't mind."

Eldest nodded in a grand manner, reaching his hand out toward me.

I don't understand what he did, but I should knock him down before he has the chance to do anything.

However, it feels like approaching him carelessly would be just as dangerous.

"Freeze."

Eldest spoke in the moment I hesitated, I instinctively stopped moving.

"As expected, even a dragon stops moving if I speak?"

What... does he mean?

"You were too careless, too ignorant. No matter how strong the magic you can use is, you cannot defend yourself."

I didn't understand what Eldest was getting at.

"Now then, you nod off too."

Eldest faced his palm out to me and my eyes slowly closed.

For now, I'll give lightly biting his hand a shot.

“Guah!?”

Just as I did that, Eldest screamed and held his hand.

“How!? How can you move!?”

Even if you ask me why...

“It's not like I stopped being able to move to begin with though?”

I stopped in spite of myself when he told me to, but it wasn't as though I stopped being able to move.

When I tried out moving my tail, it moved as faithfully as ever.

“What idiocy... stop! Freeze! Mentor! Do not move from there!”

Oh, so that was it?

I finally recognized the type of magic he was using and was disappointed by my own stupidity.

Why didn't I realize it until now?

Magic was driven by knowledge, one's awareness of the world. That very awareness was shaped through names.

In that case, one must not expose one's name to a Magus.

That's probably the reason why the elves all refer to each other with the names of colors.

It may not be easy for anyone other than Eldest to do it, but there's no harm in doing it.

“Sorry, Eldest-san. It looks like your magic doesn't work on me.”

In truth, it's just that my name isn't Mentor, though.

I placed my claws against Eldest's shoulder and spoke with flames rising back in my throat.

"Now then, will you accept defeat, or do you want to turn into a pile of ash? It's one or the other."

"... .. I give up."

This time, Eldest admitted his defeat.

"Gaaah! Stupid! You idiot...!"

"Don't be so angry, didn't it turn out well?"

Nina had been in a bad mood ever since we left the elven village.

But I don't know why she's angry at all.

"We got Eldest-san to recognize an alliance between our village and his, we got a method on how to prolong life, and you could come home with us, what's so bad about any of that?"

"Gah... that's why I'm saying you're an idiot!"

Nina punched my neck over and over from her position on my back.

"Nina, you didn't want to turn into a tree, right?"

"What are you... wait. No way, you're not telling me you took those words literally, right?"

"What do you mean?"

Hearing that, Nina pressed her hand against her forehead and sighed deeply.

"Becoming a tree... means that I will work as busily as a tree does in growing leaves, making flowers, and producing fruits as the seasons change."

"Eh... b-but Ultramarine said that Eldest's tree was too old so it needed to be changed to a new one?"

“That kind of tree is troublesome to take care of until it grows big. I hated doing it, so I had Ultramarine cooperate in me escaping the forest...”

Taking another glance at my face, Nina sighed again.

“Honestly, helping you is way more troubling. People don’t turn into trees...”

Nina spoke in a way that made it sound like she was amazed from the bottom of her heart. I’d normally agree with her, but there’s no way I’d know that, everything in this world goes against my common sense!

But really, being preoccupied with taking care of trees is just way too different. Just how carefree are those elves?

“Then why did Eldest dislike the idea of me taking you away so much?”

Hearing her explanation, I stopped feeling a sense of urgency like them being destroyed without Nina there. But still though, it felt like Eldest was awfully desperate.

“Well yeah... what do you think a parent would do after seeing their daughter run away from home and come back with a dragon?”

“Eldest is Nina’s father...?”

Thinking about it, isn’t that natural?

The elves were obviously a community built with its eldest member leading it.

In that case, Nina—the one they call their princess—would naturally be his daughter.

“Then... Nina, did you not want to return with us?”

Did I end up forcing her into something she didn’t want because of my misunderstanding?

In that case, Nina being angry would be natural.

Just as I started to think about that, Nina silently pulled on my horns with a jerk.

“Ouch, Nina, that hurts.”

“You did something unnecessary, that’s all. Even though I’d prepared myself for it...”

Nina spoke in a low, muttering voice.

“But... I want to stay with Ai... and you too, I, umm...”

“Yeah. I also want to be with you, Nina.”

Unable to hear what she said as her voice trailed off, I gave her a firm response. However, she gave my horns another strong tug.

“I said that hurts!”

Even so, I get that she did it to hide her embarrassment.

“Sis wanted to stay because of me too!”

“I don’t care about you.”

Darg spoke up to poke fun at her, but she instantly shot him down.

“So cruel!”

Darg smiled, shouting as though he didn’t actually mind as his voice echoed through the sky.

“Really, you’re so stupid—”

Nina spoke both astonished and somewhat amused.

“But Nina-san staying with us makes me very happy!”

Seeing Ai smile free from worry, Nina couldn’t stop herself from smiling back.

“Oh well, guess there’s nothing to it but to hang around a bit longer.”

An elf’s *a bit* might be a fairly long time.

Relieved at that hunch, we returned home.

—Those days were the happiest I’d ever been.
I had no idea how many times I would later think back on them.

Chapter 28: Time Spiral



*I spin round and round, yet never pass through the same place twice.
I am all around you, yet cannot be grasped.
What am I?*

“I’m here! Bring out the food!”

“You’re back again?”

Nina was amazed by Ultramarine immediately saying some very bandit-like words first thing upon arriving.

“You have a lot of free time, don’t you?”

She said that, but she still started defrosting the frozen behemoth meat. I took a jar of oil from the shelf and carefully heated it with my fire so that it wouldn’t ignite. All things said and done, those two are close friends.

“Hmph. You know, you don’t seem to like being called Dropout at all for some reason!”

“I told you to call me Nina. Dropout means [Dunce] in the humans’ language, it feels horrible getting called that.”

When Nina put the behemoth's meat into the hot oil, it started bubbling with a crisp sound as a savory fragrance spread through the room. I'd like to use wheat flour as well if I could, but, unfortunately, let alone the millstone that would be needed, I haven't even found anything similar enough to wheat yet. Ah well, frying it alone ends up being delicious anyway.

"Mm, it does, huh... but are you fine having such a simple name?"

"I'm fine with it. Besides, anything's fine for a nickname."

There were two general ways to avoid being affected by magic that uses one's name to dominate them.

First, hide your true name and only give others a sort of nickname. Even simple true names like Nina's can be used to great effect. You have to know that it is definitely their true name, though, you couldn't just guess to try and find it out—that wouldn't work.

The other way was the exact opposite. Rename yourself and fully embrace it, keeping it to yourself. Ai and Darg seemed to have done so, I don't know the names they thought up either.

Ai said that she'd tell me her's, but I refused her. I'll never manipulate her like Eldest did back then and at least this way, there's no chance of it being overheard. I want to eliminate as many loose ends as possible.

"Alright, it's done. Don't burn yourself."

The best part about being a red dragon is that I don't get burned even if hot oil splashes out of the pan at me. Actually, I'm fine even sticking my fingers straight into the pan. Putting the sliced, deep-fried behemoth onto plant leaves Nina created, I handed it over to Ultramarine.

"Aaah! Haah! Hoooot!!"

Ignoring the advice I gave her since it was just deep-fried, Ultramarine stuck it straight into her mouth and was suffering as a

result.

“You should listen to what people tell you...”

“No, it tastes better if you eat it like this!”

Ultramarine held fast to her reasoning as Nina watched her in astonishment, all the while pouring more water into her cup. I can’t sympathize with her anymore—even if I tried by eating magma—but I understand her feelings on it.

“There really is a ton of delicious things out of the forest.”

Still smacking her lips, Ultramarine raised her hand for seconds.

Food was abundant inside the forest as well, but gargantuan creatures like the behemoth could only be found in the grasslands. Contrary to how you might think something that big would taste bland, it actually had a rather enriched flavor throughout all of its elastic, chewy meat. I could also understand at least a bit of why Ultramarine wanted to leave her forest to come here and eat.

“Ooh, smells like you’re eating something good here. Mind if I join in?”

I heard a certain person’s deep voice calling in from outside the window, he was probably lured over by the smell.

“Peeping through windows is bad manners.”

“Heheh, sorry Sis.”

Nina’s nonchalant criticisms caused the large man to bend forward as he walked in through the entrance.

“... Mmm?”

Seeing that, Ultramarine knit her brows gracefully and frowned.

“Bearmonkey, did you shrink?”

“Who’s this self-entitled longears?”

Dargo pointed a finger at Ultramarine while stuffing an entire strip of fried behemoth into his mouth.

“Don’t talk with food in your mouth. Don’t point at people.”

“Whoops, sorry.”

Dargo’s shoulders froze, similar to how Darg’s used to.

“Ultramarine, he’s Dargo. Darg’s—the person you call Bearmonkey’s—son.”

“Oh, you know my old man?”

Reaching for seconds, Dargo nodded as he figured out who she was.

“His son...? Humans really do grow up fast. Maybe not to the point of Bearmonkey, but he looks pretty strong. Evergreen was talking about wanting to have a rematch, but both him and his kid might end up losing to the two of you again.”

Ultramarine had spoke casually as she licked her fingertips, but Nina and I both sunk into silence.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

“Well, my old man can’t really do that anymore.”

“Can’t do what?”

“Fighting.”

“Eh?”

When Dargo responded, Ultramarine stopped eating and her mouth fell open as a vacant response slipped from her lips.

“What? He can’t fight? Did he lose his arms?”

“No, he’s just getting old. He practically hasn’t even went out to go hunting since he hurt his lower back year before last. He was like a rock when I was a runt, but nowadays he’s gotten more like a

withered tree.”

Ultramarine had trouble processing what Dargo said, her eyes blinking in succession.

“Wait... what? Did I make a mistake somewhere in learning your language? I don’t get what you’re saying!”

“Ultramarine.”

“Bearmonkey’s the number one warrior among everyone I know! He even swept the floor with the biggest elf, Evergreen—not even Violet can get a hit in on him, and she’s the strongest! That man... a withered tree?”

“Ultramarine. Please...”

Nina’s chiding voice not quite reaching her, Ultramarine had continued to speak out in confusion.

“Oh, Ultramarine-san, you came over?”

Then, at a time like that, it happened.

Ai appeared from the back room.

“Long time no see. You haven’t changed at all, have you?”

Ultramarine’s eyes slowly opened wide.

“Who... are you...?”

I clenched my jaw, my teeth grinding against one another.

“I’m Ai. The last time we met was... somewhere over ten years ago, I think. I’ve turned into an old lady since then, you probably don’t recognize me by now, do you?”

Ai hadn’t changed at all, she was still beautiful... but now there were deep wrinkles lining her smiling face.

“Ultramarine. Come on, go home already.”

“Eh!? But I just got here!?”

Nina probably felt the same as me. Semi-forcibly, she drove Ultramarine away.

Having the reality of slowly growing old thrust in front of you like that was painful.

In the end, be it stopping Ai’s aging or even just extending her life, nothing we did worked.

The second method of prolonging life that the elves’ Eldest taught us was to turn into a monster that lived off of drinking blood and was unable to exist in the sunlight forever through a ceremony of the shadow people that lived in the desert.

The third method was to petrify her through the use of a venom from a type of two-headed lizard that lived on a continent on the other side of the ocean.

The fourth method was to eat a certain fruit that could be found at the edge of the world. The fruit didn’t exist.

There was no way I could ever make Ai become an immortal through those methods, so I flew all over the world looking for another way. Literally, all over the world.

I fought with the lizardmen of the east to gain their recognition through force, but they were a simplistic tribe that only relied on their bodies to survive and were unable to use magic.

I spent a number of years on visiting the fishmen of the south to gain their trust and was eventually able to differentiate between, along with learn magic for curing wounds. Unfortunately, it didn’t allow for perpetual youth like what could be found in Earth’s fables.

I met with mountain giants. With centaurs. I even met with other dragons.

Some welcomed me amicably, others escaped thinking that I was their enemy.

However, not one of them knew of a method for achieving eternal life.

I spent years, decades even, searching, searching, and searching—and then, on a certain day, Ai spoke to me.

She said that rather than being separated as I looked for a one in a million possibility, she wanted to live with me as long as she could.

Ai's first—and possibly last—act of selfishness.

I ceded to her.

“... I'm sorry.”

Her body curled into a small ball in despondence, the way she acted since back when she was ten years old hadn't changed at all.

“There's nothing to apologize for.”

I stroked Ai's now white-tinged hair.

Even magic had things that it couldn't do.

I realized that fact in the worst possible way.

Chapter 29: A Promise

Words of the future from a time long past.

Sixty-nine years have passed since I met Ai.

Both Darg and Ken... as well as all of those that had lived in the cave Ai came from have already died.

Living amongst their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, Ai was the last one left.

“—... The owner of many names, the flow of time, death itself... Remove yourself from this body of mine, vanish.”

Finished reciting the very, very long incantation, Ai breathed out a sigh and laid down on the bed.

It was a specially made felt from the wool of a sheep I'd captured from another continent.

It couldn't hold a candle to what modern Earth was capable of, but Ai smiled nonetheless, saying it was remarkably better than sleeping on straw on the ground.

“Ai, are you feeling alright...? Don't push yourself, it's okay.”

“I'm fine, it's... like my daily routine, now.”

Ai spoke slowly, her tone unsteady.

The extravagantly lengthy incantation to prolong life took somewhere around ten minutes to recite. She'd been reciting it each and every day, even when I wasn't there. She practically couldn't even stand anymore, but she still continued with the custom.

I thought that the magic might have had no effect, but seeing as how Ai has had such a long life, it looks like it may have unexpectedly worked somewhat.

But even so, it was just to the level of being mere consolation.

“Besides... either way, I won’t have... much longer.”

Unable to respond to her, I just combed her bangs.

Nina had told me the same thing.

Ai had just a few more days to live.

I couldn’t imagine a world without her in it.

Meanwhile, on that thought, I could feel a sense of resignation spreading through my chest.

She, as a human of this era, had lived long beyond her time.

Her aged body had grown weak, no longer able to run through the fields, unable to talk cheerfully, unable to hear much of anything.

Watching over her like that was painful for me.

“Mentor.”

Ai gazed at me intently.

“Could I ask you... one last thing?”

“What? I’ll answer anything.”

Please don’t let this be the last, the end.

Desperately pinning that feeling down as it threatened to overwhelm me, I just barely managed to force a smile on my face.

“I want—to know... Mentor’s name.”

“My name?”

Dragons don’t live together, not even with their own children for very long.

They held an incredible amount of knowledge, so they were probably also knew how to seize beings by understanding their name.

Which might be why they don't bestow names.

It felt strange to give myself a name, so I'd told Ai to just call me Mentor. That alias had spread to the people in the village, only two people didn't call me that. Those two were Nina and Darg.

"Didn't I explain it before? Dragons don't have names. That's why I said for you all to call me Mentor, it's my name."

"What I want to know... is Mentor's name, as a human."

Her words caused me to suddenly remember it.

Right. I used to be a human.

I didn't forget about it, of course.

But I'd almost lived as long as a dragon as I did as a human.

I'd grown accustomed to living as a dragon, enough so that my awareness of having been something else previously began to dim.

"So... you noticed?"

I'd never told anyone that I was formerly a human.

It wouldn't particularly be a problem if they did know, but I thought that no one would believe me either way.

"I know everything... about you, Mentor."

Ai spoke with a slight smile on her face.

She wasn't exaggerating, it was probably true.

Her ears were failing, but for some reason, she never stopped being able to hear me.

"I... yeah. I was a human. I wasn't a human of this world, though.

I was a human that lived in an entirely different world.”

Ai, not appearing to doubt me in the least, nodded as she listened.

“That world didn’t have magic... no, I suppose I should say it only had one. That magic... was my reincarnation into this world as a dragon.”

“Reincarnation...”

Ai played with the word, ruminating on it.

“Ryouji. My name from when I was a human is Ryouji Sekiguchi. Written like this.”

Saying that, I wrote the characters for my name in the air.

“... Ryouji... san...”

The instant Ai muttered that, my entire body felt as though it were burning.

Be it when I soaked in hot water or when I accidentally set some trees that had been surrounding me on fire—not even the time I bathed in magma—I had never felt a heat this hot.

This was the first tense I felt *hot* since I was born as a dragon.

My belly burned, my arms twisted, and my vision blurred.

However, the mysteriously, it wasn’t painful.

The feeling passed just as abruptly as it began.

“Ryouji-san... is that...?”

Blinking several times upon seeing Ai look strangely close to me, I realized—

“... It appears so.”

—that my appearance had changed into that of a human.

“This... is you?”

“Probably... I think.”

Her eyes opened wide, Ai stared at me fixedly.

I stretched out a trembling arm and gently placed my hand against her cheek.

And then embraced her closely.

Not even something like this.

Not even something like this... could I do until now.



Embracing the body of the woman I loved so dearly for the first time, she felt small and delicate, like she might break if I put even the smallest amount of strength into my embrace.

“Ah...”

Ai's arms reaching around my back, she let out a content voice.

Her moistened eyes glittering like starlight, she looked at me in earnest.

Honest, earnest... her eyes, looking straight into me, wouldn't change no matter how much time passed.

She'd come to me as a sacrifice—young and innocence, our spring.

She grew up to be lovely, like new leaves sprouting on a tree—the girl I'd yearned, our summer.

Beautiful as a vividly colored flower—when she confessed her love, our autumn.

Countless wrinkles biting into her skin—the woman that supported me as my wife, our winter.

Through the years, her eyes had only ever seen me.

“I was happy.”

Me too.

Even though I had to say it, my mouth didn't move.

“That I could meet you... and stay with you...”

Don't go, please.

It was all I could do to keep myself from spouting my own selfishness.

“I was really, really... happy.”

Even if my form had turned into a human's, a portion of my senses appeared to remain as a dragon's.

For the first time since I was reborn, I cursed that I was born as a fire dragon.

The magic that had turned me into a human seemed to have taken the last of her strength.

Steadily, the warmth drained from her lips, her eyes, her fingers...

That she was gradually dying was frightfully clear to me.

How easy would it be for me to beg, to scream, for her to not leave me alone?

I'd pondered whether I should end my life with hers many times.

I didn't want to imagine living for hundreds, thousands of years in a world that didn't have her in it.

"Yeah... meeting you made me... really, really happy, too..."

Enduring the agony assaulting me, I finally managed to squeeze out my voice.

I had to tell her.

To tell her that she had given me just as much happiness, that her smile was the sun that lit my world.

"Mentor, you're... so gentle. I love you."

But Ai smiled in response, seemingly able to see through all of my thoughts.

"So, again... I'll—"

Mustering the rest of her strength, Ai mouthed her words.

She was so weak that she couldn't even cause the air to vibrate.

It was her final breath.

"... It's over?"

"Yeah."

After nodding back to Nina's quiet question, I suddenly noticed.

"Not going to react?"

"There's nothing different though? Same gold eyes, same red head."

Even though my appearance was completely different than when I'm a dragon, she had no reaction at all and responded as much.

"Well, if forced..."

She looked up at me and continued.

"I thought you'd look more like a kid."

"I really am as a dragon though."

I can't be sure since there's no mirror in sight, but judging by my arms and legs, my form is around that of a twenty-year-old human. I can't say how long a dragon's lifespan is, but that should at the very least be considered young for a dragon.

"... You're less depressed than I thought you'd be."

"No, I'm staggeringly depressed."

If Nina weren't here right now, I'd be crying my eyes out.

However.

"Nina. Let's make a magic academy."

I spoke the same words to her that I'd used long ago.

"...? Didn't you make it?"

Ai really was a wonderful wife.

She thought of me to the very end.

"A bigger, better school."

Dragon's ears truly are sharp.

Sharp to the extent that they could hear Ai's last words, words that didn't even make it past her mouth.

Therefore, I'll believe in the words she left me and look forward.

"Let's make such a wonderful academy that everyone in the world knows about it."

Because.

Because someday, she will return.

Chapter 30: Reincarnation

Have you ever thought that you wanted to fly through the sky?

Whenever I look up at the blue sky, whenever I see a white cloud floating through it, whenever I see birds soaring through it, that's what I think.

How fun would it be to fly?

I can't really remember what I thought about before learning how to talk, but I think that I felt the same back then too.

My life revolved around never having enough food. Going out to gather fruits and nuts, run from beasts, and see my brothers head out to die, that's all.

It's not that I was dissatisfied with it, though.

It's just that that was my world, I never thought about there being any other way.

... Not knowing that there was anything beyond the sky and thinking that I'd die before long, I think that I'd resigned myself to it.

What blew it all away was a big, big dragon that descended from the sky.

I was frightened when I first met the dragon, thinking that it would be what ended my life.

However.

"It's okay, little miss. It's okay, see? I'm a good dragon."

I wasn't able to understand what it was saying, but I could tell from its tone that it was very gentle. While I didn't know the meaning of its words, I could tell what he was trying to say.

Which is why when dad went to pick out a child in order to offer them to the dragon, I insisted that I be the first one.

If I went to that red dragon that could fly through the sky, something would change.

I fully embraced that whimsical hope.

In truth, it wasn't the kind of tale where something simply changed.

That dragon... Mentor was tens, hundreds of times weirder than I thought, the kind of person I'd never be able to fit into a single category.

We didn't even have a language back then, in the first place.

Names. Wooden houses. Cooked food. Clay containers. Salt. Spoons. Concepts. Sorting between plants and animals. Energy. Letters. Combs. Baths.

And finally, magic.

All of what Mentor dreamed up were things we'd never seen or heard of before, so, for the youth that I was, falling for him was a matter of course... that feeling developed into a deep affection before long, too.

And as I watched Mentor from the side, he somehow came to notice the awfully ordinary *me*.

He loved peace, wasn't very good at fighting, and while was gentle, he did get angry at times.

And he was very cowardly—that is, he was just a pinch indecisive.

Even though he was a stronger dragon than any and knew there were things he didn't know despite being so knowledgable, he was an ordinary man on the inside.

Rather than thinking that Mentor was weird, all of that came

together in making him more friendly than any other dragon, causing me to become more and more fond of him.

... Well, I do think that me speaking so frankly to Jack Frost about my feelings that he cooperated with me might have been a little overdoing it, but no one other than Nina-san found out about that, so please just chalk it all up to youthful indiscretion and let me off about it.

I don't know how other people will think of me.

Never having children, never coming to know that final pleasure a woman could have, and dying just after finally embracing my beloved for the first time, people might think that I was an idle woman.

Nina-san, for example.

She was a person that said stuff like that entirely clearly.

But I don't think I was.

I really, truly enjoyed the life I spent alongside Mentor.

I don't have a shred of regret about it, nor could I think of a better way to spend it. If I had ten more times to do it, I'd go through all ten the same way.

Magic was something comprised of names.

Mentor told me that countless times.

He was, of course, just talking about the principles of magic.

But for me, that wasn't all it was.

What he gave me since the very beginning.

That was surely the most wonderful of all magic.

As a teacher, as a father, as a brother, and as a husband.

Mentor showered me with nothing but overflowing, pure love.

Which is why I, eventually, was also able to use magic.

He was the one that told me I could.

So please.

It may take tens, hundreds, or thousands of years.

But I will definitely meet him again.

Please, wait for me. Ryouji-san——

Postscript

Hello everyone. I'm Ishinomiya Kant.

The special prize for the Kakuyomu Web Novel Contest was being able to publish a novel, so I was able to publish this as a book.

It was an unexpected pleasure.

Speaking of Fujimi Fantasy Books, they were the publisher of the first light novel I experienced back when I was still a student.

I never thought that I'd one day be able to somehow have one of my own novels published, I'm deeply moved about it all.

Well, I got more pages to use for my postscript than I thought I would, so I wonder what I should write about?

I could speak imitate my great predecessors and speak lengthily about my frightfully adorable daughter while packing smoke into a pipe, but this is my first work, so I'll restrain myself and speak about it for a little while.

I love those *How I Began* stories writers tend to do, so I'll do something similar here. Everything that exists in this world as something now taken as commonplace was produced through the schemes and wisdom of someone who once lived.

Each one of those things have their circumstances, their history, and their story. However, those will, eventually, be forgotten, becoming something familiar in the world—becoming the norm.

That process is unbearably attractive to me.

There exists many different fantasy worlds in the world. Among them exists things like magic, spirits, curses, etcetera. When you read worlds like that, I always get the feeling of *Who did it first?* That's what I wanted to depict.

And thus I wanted to write *The Magus of Genesis*.

I know that I'm no good at making a title. It is what it is.

Speaking of titles, the titles of each chapter should be immediately recognizable to players of *Magic: The Gathering*.

The sentences that follow them are flavor text.

They are sentences spoken by the story's characters left for future generations, the wise sayings of real people, proverbs and the like, as well as sentences that add some flavor to the story.

I worried about the flavor text as much as the story proper a few times.

Finally, I would like offer a few words of thanks.

To everyone that picked up this book:

Did you enjoy the story? Being able to sway the hearts of our readers and perhaps leave even a tiny something behind is the joy of an author.

To the readers who cheered me on and supported the series back when I was only serializing it on Kakuyomu:

For you to follow me not just on my web publications but with this book as well, I am extremely honored. Thank you all for your support and patronage as I worked to publish this.

To the Kakuyomu administration, as well as everyone at KADOKAWA Fantasy Books' editorial department:

For giving me such a wonderful opportunity, I thank you with all I have.

To Chief Editor-sama:

I am immensely appreciative for troubling you in revising the web version style for publication, as well as for any

further trouble. Truly, thank you for everything. I will definitely do better on the next one... probably.

To Faru Maro-sensei, who worked as a wonderful illustrator:

You lit up my monochrome story with your vivid, good-looking style. Rather than being dismayed by how almost all of the characters would grow up or change for story reasons, you actually said that it was fun. Are you an angel?

To the designers, the printing office, everyone at the book making area, everyone involved with distribution, all of the bookshop workers, Sid Meier who gave me such inspiration, Wizards of the Coast, my friends who gave me their time in helping me work through my grumbles, my beloved wife and daughter who both supported me through all of my writing, and all of the people who are related to this book:

I would like to express my sincere gratitude. Really, thank you very much.

-Ishinomiya Kanto

Translator Comment:

Hello, everyone. I hope you enjoyed this first volume of The Magus of Genesis. For this series, I decided to do something a little different than I usually do as a translator and localize everything but honorifics. From the responses I've seen from readers, that translation style appears to be working out well for this series. I'm glad, it was a pretty big jump from what I usually leave in series like Lazy Dungeon Master, so I wasn't sure what you all would think!

As we move forward into volume two and beyond, I'll personally be making sure to keep in mind who was around in the prologue. I wonder if I'm spoiling myself like that? Hrm. Well, either way, the explorative and inquisitive tone this series comes with and what it makes me feel has been a joy. Be sure to thank the author and buy the books if you can, I've included links for doing so in the table of contents

page!